

Employment for People with Disabilities Living in Rural South Dakota

Overview

Some people with disabilities, young and old, choose to live in rural areas. Often times services needed to support these individuals in reaching their employment goals are limited or may not even exist. Yet, this is where they want to live and work. "Communities" can help people with disabilities by looking at creative ways to partner with one another in support of those living in their communities.

Natural Supports

Relatively few people are totally self-sufficient – living independent of others. Most people, with or without disabilities, have become reliant on a variety of natural supports that exist in every community. Many of our natural supports are so much a part of our lives that we no longer see them as supports. We see them as essential services i.e., teachers, mailmen, first responders, doctors, family, friends, co-workers, social and civic organizations, volunteer opportunities and the list goes on.

Every local community and neighborhood has individuals and organizations where people go to seek advice, information and support. Many of these informal sources that regularly provide advice and support would not identify support as a part of their activities. These individuals provide natural supports for people around them.

Linking to Natural Supports

In order to link to natural supports a person must first identify the local opportunities that exist. Many networking opportunities can be easily identified from the person's with disabilities routines, hobbies and passions. Opportunities also exist through the services they use i.e., beautician, barber, store owner/employees, church, recreation outlets, bank tellers, convenience store owner/employees. Each contact with these individuals is an opportunity to practice conversation and social skills, as well as explore employment opportunities that may exist in the community.

Volunteer Opportunities as Door Openers to Employment

Volunteering provides an opportunity to gain valuable employment experience. It also expands a person's social network from the interactions they have with the people they work with. Identifying volunteer opportunities within your community, and exploring the opportunity to volunteer, often can lead to future employment with those organizations or with others as a result of the linkages made while volunteering.

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Formal Supports

Many public and private agencies support people with disabilities seeking to be employed. Even though their main offices may be located in larger communities, many have staff that reaches into the most rural portions of our state. Some of those resources are:

**South Dakota Division of
Rehabilitation Services**
800-265-9684
<http://dhs.sd.gov/drs/>

**South Dakota Division of Service to the
Blind & Visually Impaired**
800-265-9684
<http://dhs.sd.gov/sbvi/>

Other agencies that may be able to provide formal supports are your local community support providers (formerly adjustment training centers), mental health centers, and Department of Labor offices.

Natural Supports

- Anyone interested in your life can contribute to being a natural support.
- Natural supports are based on what “you” want, not on what “professionals” recommend. This enables you to be who you are, allowing you to grow and (perhaps) lessen existing problems.
- Natural supports will support your choices and provide you with a safety net when things go bad.
- As you rely more on natural supports, your need for services reduces.
- Natural supports help to broaden your world, and with a larger world comes more options and more choices.

Consumer Organizations

- South Dakota Advocates for Change
- South Dakota Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities
- Peer Support Groups

Church and Service Organizations

- Rotary
- Kiwanis
- Lions

Other Community Supports

- Former Teachers
- Coaches
- Local Business People