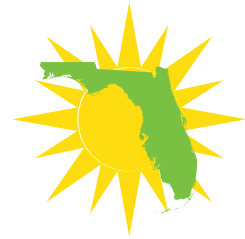


Employment First Florida

Employment Empowerment Toolkit



Employment First FLORIDA

Introduction

Since 2015 Employment First Florida local collaborative sites have been on the cutting edge of creating solutions to help people with disabilities get the help they need to work. To further support local communities in Florida to prioritize employment for individuals with disabilities, the Institute for Community Inclusion has developed the Employment Empowerment Toolkit. The toolkit is designed to support job seekers, families, teachers, case managers, employment staff, and other direct support staff to make employment the first option for all Floridians with disabilities.

This toolkit is a series of short actionable guides that people can use in their daily lives to support employment for people with disabilities. They can be used on an individual basis, in a team setting, or across an entire organization. The guides are grouped by the type of user: job seekers, families, teachers, case managers, employment staff, and Adult Day Training Staff. Guides for other stakeholders can be developed on request.

Each guide describes:

- What Employment First Florida is
- Why employment is important for people with disabilities
- What the person reading the guide can do to support employment

For more information about the Employment First Florida project:

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University of Massachusetts Boston

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“Employment First” means that working in the community should be a choice for everyone, with or without a disability.

The Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston is working with the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council and other state agencies to make “Employment First” happen in Florida.



Florida
Developmental
Disabilities
Council, Inc.

For more information about Employment First Florida, please visit the website www.EmploymentFirstFL.org/



What is Employment First Florida?

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Integrated employment...where an individual is paid by an employer at minimum wage or greater or receives earnings through one's self-employment business, fully integrated in the community workforce, with a goal of maximum self-sufficiency.

Why is employment important for people with disabilities?

People with disabilities are **LESS** likely to work and **MORE** likely to live in poverty when compared to people without disabilities (www.statedata.info). Poverty is incredibly limiting. It limits where you live, how you get places, what you do in your free time, and the number of people you know.

Employment not only helps to reduce poverty, but also gives us independence and control over our own life. It presents us with the opportunity to learn new things, gain skills, and make friends with people we meet through our job.

What can job seekers do to find employment?

Everyone has the right to work in their community. No matter what disability someone has, if they get the right services and supports, they will be able to work.

Actions you can take to find a job

Learn about jobs in your community:

- Talk to friends and family members about their careers.
- Make a community map, and think about businesses in your community where you might want to work.
- Request a visit to a business you like for a tour or interview.
- Make a list of questions to ask on an informational interview.
- Go on an informational interview.

Get ready to apply for a job:

- List people in your network who can connect you to a job.
- Pick up or print out from online job applications at places you would like to work.
- Talk openly about your feelings about working in the community, including your dreams and fears.

Applying for a job:

- Prepare to write a resume by making a list of jobs you have held.
- Make a list of three to five people who might be willing to serve as personal or professional references and call them.
- Give copies of your resume to people who are acting as references.
- Remove inappropriate posts from your social media accounts.

Get help from:

- Visit your local CareerSource Florida: <http://careersourceflorida.com/>
- Apply to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) for help. Visit DVR's website here: <http://www.rehabworks.org/>
- You may be eligible for services from the Agency for Persons with Disabilities (APD). APD can help even if you are on the waiver wait list. Visit APD's website here: <http://apd.myflorida.com/>
- You may be eligible for services from the Division of Blind Services (DBS). Visit DBS's website here: <http://dbs.myflorida.com/>
- You may be eligible for services from the state Substance Abuse and Mental Health program (SAMH). Visit SAMH's website here: <https://www.myflfamilies.com/service-programs/samh/>
- If you receive Social Security Administration (SSA) benefits, contact the Ticket to Work helpline to learn how you can work and maintain access to health care and other benefits. Visit SSA's website: <https://choosework.ssa.gov/>
- Visit your local Center for Independent Living (CIL) to learn about resources that can help you work and live in the community. CILs support people with disabilities to live in their communities with equal opportunities, self-determination, and respect. CILs serve all disabilities and all ages in every county in Florida. You can find your local CIL here: <https://www.floridacils.org/>
- Request a meeting with a certified Community Work Incentive Counselor (CWIC). CWICs help people plan their work lives. This includes helping people understand how work impacts health insurance and cash benefits. Many Centers for Independent Living have a CWIC as a member of their staff.
- Learn about your rights, including disclosing or not disclosing a disability, how to ask for a job accommodation, and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Your local Center for Independent Living can assist you.

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What can families do to support people with disabilities to work in the community?

Families play a critical role in helping people with disabilities prepare for employment and post-secondary education. Family is important for many reasons: family members can motivate people to work, and can help them understand why work is important. Families can also have a big influence on self-determination and empowerment, helping people develop a real understanding of themselves and their place in the workplace.

Actions families can take

During childhood:

- Instill a sense of learning by trial and error. Help children learn from an early age that failure is a natural part of life.
- Encourage simple tasks at home (for example, helping to clean up after dinner). With each year, increase responsibilities for family chores.
- Read books and view videos about different types of jobs.
- Participate in "Take your child to work" day so early on the child is exposed to what it's like to go to work.
- Talk about what your family member might want to do for work and begin to document the steps it will take to achieve this goal.

During the teen years:

- Apply for services from the adult service system, such as Vocational Rehabilitation and the Agency for Persons with Disabilities.
- Request that Social Security benefits planning be integrated into the IEP and include a meeting with a certified Community Work Incentive Counselor (CWIC). CWICs help people plan their work lives, including providing information about how work impacts health insurance and cash benefits.
- Request that the IEP include access to both technical and academic coursework.
- Participate in local transition fairs and college fairs.

- Support teens to visit different types of employment environments, interview people in different careers, and participate in a variety of apprenticeships.
- Support teens to volunteer in their community during and outside of the school day.
- For teens 14 years and older, ensure that a cross-agency transition plan has been developed for eligible youth.
- Support young adults to develop a resume, apply for jobs, interview, and obtain employment.
- Work with transition staff to identify possible jobs within the family social network.
- At the time of school exit, ensure that teens have obtained paid employment in the community and/or are enrolled in post-secondary education.
- Continue to encourage your family member through the ups and downs of first employment experiences. Share stories of your own first job experiences and what you learned.

When Searching for a job:

- Stay involved in the job search through communication with your family member and others who are helping them look for a job. People who may be helping with the job search include job developers and case managers.
- Share your personal or professional networks with job developers so that there is a wider net available to help your family member find job leads. Provide introductions to friends or acquaintances and see what opportunities may develop.
- Don't get stuck on what your family member can't do. Focus on what they can and/or want to do, and what supports will be needed to make this happen.
- Help your family member become skilled at job interviewing. Talk about practice interview questions, how to dress, and how to make a good first impression on a potential employer.

When accepting a job:

- Accepting a job is a choice. Help your family member make a list of the pros and cons for accepting a position. Sometimes choosing to not take a job offer is the right decision. Be careful to keep all job options open. Some questions for your family member to think about:
- What about this job will make you happy?
- Is this job a good fit for your skills and your interests?
- What might be difficult about this job?
- How easy is it to get to? How will you get there?
- What other opportunities might this job lead you to?

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What can teachers do to support people with disabilities to work?

Teachers play a critical role in helping people with disabilities prepare for employment and post-secondary education. One of the biggest predictors of youth with disabilities being employed after high school is previous work experience. Teachers can help people with disabilities and their families to see employment as an expected outcome, beginning in early intervention services and through to the age of 21 for eligible youth.

Actions teachers can take

With elementary students:

- Read stories with children about different types of jobs and integrate opportunities to learn about employment into the curriculum.
- Coordinate presentations at elementary, middle, and high schools by young adults with disabilities about their jobs.
- Support children with and without disabilities to complete age-appropriate responsibilities in the classroom. Examples include: bringing the class lunch order to the cafeteria, reciting the school motto, and helping to pass out materials to classmates.
- Empower children to make age-appropriate choices throughout their day and to engage in activities to build self-determination skills. Examples include: selecting peers to sit with during lunch, selecting activities for recess, and participating in extracurricular activities.
- Incorporate photographs of employed adults with disabilities into the school curriculum.
- With middle and high school students:
 - Provide access to both technical and academic coursework.
 - Support teens to visit different types of employment environments, interview people in different careers, and participate in a variety of apprenticeships.
 - Support teens to volunteer in their community during and outside of the school day.

- Ensure that teens and their families receive information about employment and adult services. Transition fairs, Facebook Live events, and recorded webinars are all strategies being used in Florida.
- Encourage youth to take part in college and vocational school fairs and meet disability coordinators from the participating schools. Provide information about who can help with the financial aid application process.
- For eligible youth ages 14 and older, ensure that a cross-agency transition plan has been developed that ensures that teens have obtained paid employment in the community and/or are enrolled in post-secondary education.

With partners:

- Support young adults to access services from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Support students to visit a local Center for Independent Living (CIL) to learn about resources that can help them work and live in the community. CILs provide tools, resources, and supports for integrating people with disabilities fully into their communities to promote equal opportunities, self-determination, and respect. CILs serve all disabilities and all ages in every county in Florida. Find your local CIL here: <https://www.floridacils.org/>
- Integrate Social Security benefits planning into the Individual Education Plan, including a referral to a meeting with a certified Community Work Incentive Counselor (CWIC). CWICs help people plan their work lives, including sharing information about how work impacts health insurance and cash benefits. Many Centers for Independent Living have a CWIC as a member of their staff.
- Support youth to learn about assistive technology and how it can help on the job. Florida's assistive technology program is called FFAST, Inc. Visit their website: <https://faast.org/>

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What can case managers do to support people with disabilities to work?

Case managers play a critical role in helping people with developmental disabilities prepare for, find, and maintain employment. They are often the first ones to get the employment conversation started by asking questions and providing information.

Here are some conversation starters you can use to make employment the first option for people with disabilities:

- What's your biggest question about work?
- Tell me about past work you have done
- Imagine yourself working. What would you be doing?
- What worries you about getting a job?
- What's the best that can happen if you get a job?
- What's the worst that can happen if you get a job?
- How do your family and friends feel about you getting a job?
- How would earning more money change your everyday life?
- Let's talk about people who can help you find a job and get trained to do it well...

Follow-up actions

- Validate the individual's goals and dreams and let them know you are there to help.
- Include a goal for employment in the individual's service plan.
- Develop an action plan that supports the individual to obtain and maintain a job in the community.
- Support individuals to visit your local CareerSource Florida: <http://careersourceflorida.com/>

- Support individuals to apply for services from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), including community-based vocational assessments. Visit DVR's website: <http://www.rehabworks.org/>
- Support individuals to learn about assistive technology and how it can help on the job. Florida's assistive technology program is called FFAST, Inc.: <https://faast.org/>
- Help individuals to:
 - » Talk to friends and family members about their career goals.
 - » Make an employer community map, and think about businesses in their local community where they might want to work.
 - » List people in their network who can connect them to a job.
 - » Request a visit to a business the person likes for a tour or interview.
 - » Call three employers that they are interested in working for.
 - » Make a list of questions to ask on an informational interview and go on an informational interview.
 - » Prepare to write a resume by bringing in a list of jobs they have held.
 - » Print out five online job listings that look interesting, and discuss next steps for applying.
 - » Pick up job applications at places they would like to work.
 - » Research a company online.
 - » Make a list of three to five people who might be willing to serve as personal or professional references and call them.
 - » Give copies of their resume to people who are acting as references.

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What can employment staff do to support people with disabilities to work?

Employment staff play a critical role in helping people with disabilities prepare for, find, and maintain employment. They can affect not only the job outcome, but also the individual's job choices and the involvement of family and other supports in the job-placement process.

Many employment agencies require that job seekers have a plan for finding a job, called something like an Individual Work Rehabilitation Plan or Individual Plan for Employment. Usually, this plan includes a broad statement about what type of position the job seeker wants and some basic steps for how to find that kind of work. While these plans can be a positive step, they often focus too heavily on the services the agency provides rather than on the steps the job seeker can take.

Using a 30-Day Placement Plan can be more effective in making employment the first option for people with disabilities. A 30-Day Placement Plan is different from a typical plan for employment in several ways:

- Keeps everyone on track and focused on the job search.
- Ensures that specific job-search tasks are accomplished each week.
- Helps the job seeker and their support network become more invested in the job search.
- Both the job seeker and employment specialist can feel a sense of accomplishment each month, even if a job has not been found.

Both short- and long-term goals are addressed in a 30-Day Placement Plan. Before writing the plan, a long-term career goal should be written at the top of the document so it is clear to everyone what the job seeker wants. The job seeker's skills and strengths should also be described at the start of the plan. The job seeker and employment specialist should then discuss overall goals and smaller tasks, and set time frames to complete these steps.

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What can adult day training staff do to support people with disabilities to work?

Adult Day Training (ADT) staff play a critical role in helping people with developmental disabilities prepare for employment. They can help to start conversations about employment, encourage individuals in ADT to identify their skills and interests, and support them when they are feeling discouraged.

Here are some ways you can start the conversation about employment with people with disabilities:

- Tell me about past work you have done.
- What were your favorite classes in school?
- What do you like to do in your free time?
- What are the things you are good at? What are some jobs where you might use those skills?
- Where are the places where you spend a lot of time? Who do you know in those places who can talk to you about work you might do there?
- Imagine yourself working. What would you be doing? Let's think about people you know. What jobs do they have?
- What's your biggest question about work?
- What worries you about getting a job?
- What's the best thing that can happen if you get a job?
- What's the worst thing that can happen if you get a job?
- How would earning more money change your everyday life?
- Would you like to be a business owner? If so, what kind of business would it be? Why?
- Let's talk about people who can help you find out more about working.

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