EMPLOYMENT and EMPLOYMENT FIRST

Section Overview

This section defines and establishes the importance of Employment First Legislation. It also provides the background behind the initiative, ideas on how to start the Employment First discussion in your region, and resources that you may use to answer questions and raise awareness about the Employment First initiative. Employment First is an imperative initiative which is key to the APSE mission and those who work toward improving the lives of individuals with disabilities. Utilizing the information contained within this section, you should be able to improve the foundation that you and your organization have in Employment First and become better ambassadors for APSE.

Practical Tips
1. Know the history of the Employment First initiative
2. Develop an understanding of what Employment First means
3. Find out what commitment your state/organizations have made to Employment First
4. Be a resource for others on Employment First

What is Employment First?

The U.S. Department of Labor: defines "Employment First" as "a concept to facilitate the full inclusion of people with the most significant disabilities in the workplace and community. Under the Employment First approach, community-based, integrated employment is the first option for employment services for youth and adults with significant disabilities."

APSE goes further and provides greater depth and direction for individuals and groups committed to making Employment First a reality.

http://www.apse.org/employmentfirst/keypoints.cfm

Why is it Important?

Employment First is important to ending the notion that individuals with disabilities are not productive. It is important so that community inclusion happens for all individuals of all abilities. Community employment should be the first option for everyone, not just a select few. Employment First is a necessary tool if this is to happen. Every person involved from families, service providers, and legislators must be on board with Employment First in order for these changes to take place and for people's lives to be changed for the better.

Informed Choice Argument

When deciding what options are available to an individual with a disability, it is always that person's choice. So when discussing employment options, integrated community employment should always be the first option should the person express their desire to find employment outside of a sheltered workshop. Everyone has the right for gainful employment that is not in a workshop setting, no matter their ability.

Raising Expectations

In order for Employment First to be successful, we must raise the expectations of everyone with ties to employment services. It begins with the individuals who are being served and their families. They must have buy-in into the fact that sheltered workshops are not the ultimate destination. They must know that integrated community employment is possible for everyone and should always be the first option. Then we must raise the expectations for those organizations which operate sheltered workshops and help them transition their services to focus on inclusive community employment. Finally the expectations must be raised within our communities and with our elected officials. In order to do this, a clear and concise message must be developed. How to develop and deliver this message is covered later in this toolkit.

Additional Resources

For additional resources to further enhance your understanding of Employment and the Employment First initiative, a list of links is provided below.   The resources provide a solid grounding on the Employment First Initiative.

1. APSE resources
    a. Statement on Employment First
    b. Employment First Whitepaper
    c. Employment First Policy Map
2. Senate HELP Committee
    a. *July 2013 High Expectations: Transforming the American Workforce as the ADA Generation Comes of Age*
    b. *July 2012 Unfinished Business: Making Employment of People with Disabilities a National Priority*
3. Government Accountability Office
    a. June 2012 Employment for People with Disabilities: Little is Known About Effectiveness of Fragmented and Overlapping Programs
4. Congressional Budget Office
    a. July 2012 Policy Options for the Social Security Disability Insurance Program
5. National Governor's Association
    a. July 2012 Initiative: Building a Better Bottom Line
    b. A Better Bottom Line: A Blueprint for Governors
6. State Employment Leadership Network
    a. Employment First State Policy Resource List