Facilitator’s Guide to *Preparing for Transition: Employment*

Employment for individuals with disabilities is changing. In the past, few jobs allowed interaction with co-workers with no disabilities. We now recognize the value of interacting with and contributing to diverse communities. What this means depends on the interests, dreams, and needs of each person.

For many, employment greatly promotes self-esteem. If competitive, employment can also be the key to financial independence. Individuals who want to work must consider where they want to work, how much they want to work, and how to achieve job goals. Those who are not ready, or do not want, to work may benefit from prevocational services or volunteering.

CP of NYS created this PowerPoint presentation to help you explain to individuals with disabilities and their families the transition that is occurring within the employment world and resources for managing this change.

# Delivering the PowerPoint Presentation

Families will be curious, and maybe even anxious, about employment for individuals with disabilities. What if an individual with disabilities wants to work, but does not have the skills to do so? Where will participants of a sheltered workshop that is closing find new work? You can help answer some of their questions by reviewing the slides of the presentation with them. This Facilitator’s Guide offers talking points that highlight things on each slide you want to be sure to share.

Families should receive a paper copy of the slides, so they do not have to take notes or write down contact number as they listen. Many of the slides feature a “For More Information” box. If families want more information and time allows, right-click on the hyperlinks to go to websites and download documents. The URLs are included on the slides, so families can access these resources on their own if they prefer. Before you share the presentation, insert local contact information on the final slide.

Encourage families and students to ask questions, reassuring them that no topic is too minor. If you do not know the answer to a question, offer to help find it. Depending on the extent of your conversation, the presentation will take 10-15 minutes. Upon conclusion of the presentation, offer the *Preparing for Employment* checklist of tasks to the family.

# Talking Points

## Slide 1: Title Page

Welcome. CP of NYS created this presentation to help you understand the changes that are taking place for individuals with disabilities in regard to employment. You probably have a lot of questions. I hope reviewing this information will help answer them. You’ll receive a paper copy of this presentation, so don’t worry about taking notes. If you have any questions, please ask me. If I don’t know the answer, we can work together on finding it.

## Slide 2: Our Goal

This presentation is part of a larger effort to encourage person-centered and community-based support of individuals with disabilities. Every individual, regardless of ability, has the right to choose how to spend their day and how to contribute to the community. For individuals with disabilities, various types of support make these choices possible.

You may be participating in this session because the individual with disabilities you care for has expressed interest in working for the first time or that person has recently learned that his or her current job is ending. Any of these reasons involve change and change can be difficult. Knowing that resources are available to help you through this process can help you focus on what’s most important: that the individual you support has an opportunity to engage in work or other community activities that are meaningful and of interest to him or her.

## Slide 3: Objectives

Let’s start by looking at the questions we’ll be addressing during this session.

* What is changing within employment for individuals with disabilities?
* Why are these changes taking place?
* When will the changes happen?
* Where do you begin?

At the end of the presentation, you will receive a checklist to help you on the journey to employment and other ways to contribute to the community.

## Slide 4: The Transition

Individuals with disabilities can benefit from interacting with and contributing to their communities. What this means depends on the interests, dreams, and needs of each person.

For many, employment is integral to positive self-esteem. *Competitive* employment can also be the key to financial independence. New York State’s Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) defines competitive employment as jobs where workers with disabilities

* regularly interact with co-workers who are not disabled and
* receive at least minimum wage.

More opportunities for engaging in competitive employment are now being made available to individuals with developmental disabilities.

## Slide 5: Why the Change?

The **Americans with Disabilities Act** (ADA) bans discrimination against individuals with disabilities. The U.S. Supreme Court decreed, in its **Olmstead Decision** of 1999, that the ADA also meant that people with disabilities have the right to receive state-funded supports in the community. Because of this decision, efforts to promote community integration have grown.

These efforts include the **Health System Transformation for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities Agreement** between New York State and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). CMS released new requirements to ensure that individuals receiving services have full access to the benefits of community living. The Transformation Agreement is about better meeting the needs of individuals in a person-centered way, including increasing the number of individuals who are competitively employed. **New York State’s Employment First Commission** was created to ensure that competitive, integrated employment is the first option for individuals with disabilities.

At the federal level, the **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act** limits placements at workplaces where individuals with disabilities earn less than minimum wage.

## Slide 6: New Employment Opportunities

What do all these laws and policies mean? As discussed in the last slide, individuals with disabilities have greater access to the benefits of community living. Their needs are being met in a more person-centered way.

In terms of dollars and cents, the laws and policies are working to improve the employment rate of individuals with disabilities. The employment rate for a New Yorker with a disability is only 31 percent; for a New Yorker *without* a disability, it is 72 percent. Individuals with disabilities are also more than twice as likely to live in poverty than individuals without disabilities.

## Slide 7: The Time Frame

As of July 2013, New York State stopped new admissions to sheltered workshops. It expects to no longer fund them by 2020. Instead, more opportunities for competitive employment will be offered.

## Slide 8: Resources

Many resources are available to individuals with disabilities looking for employment or other ways to contribute to their communities. We’ll talk about programs offered by three government agencies:

* New York State’s Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD)
* New York State Education Department’s Adult Career and Continuing Education Service-Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR)
* Social Security Administration (SSA)

You may already interact with one or all of these agencies, but we will review what they offer in terms of employment programs.

## Slide 9: OPWDD – Vocational Services

OPWDD is committed to helping people with disabilities live richer lives. It offers several kinds of vocational services, such as:

* Community prevocational services are for individuals who want to work, but need to develop their skills to do so. Learning and work experiences are not job specific, but build on individuals’ strengths. This might include volunteer work, such as learning how to interact with residents and staff at a senior citizens’ program where an individual would like to work someday.
* *Pathway to Employment* is a 12-month, person-centered service for individuals who are interested in working or getting ready to work. Through this service, individuals identify careers, access job readiness training, and develop a plan for securing competitive employment. It is available to individuals who receive day habilitation, prevocational, and supported employment services, as well as those leaving high school.

## Slide 10: OPWDD – Discovery

Discovery is a major component of the two services listed on the previous slide. Discovery is a process for exploring new opportunities to build a person’s skills and abilities, which helps set a direction for future employment and community participation. It reveals answers to many job-related questions, such as:

* What are the individual’s skills?
* What are the individual’s interests?
* What is the individual’s support system?
* What experiences has the individual had?
* What does the individual like to do?[[1]](#footnote-1)

## Slide 11: OPWDD – More Vocational Services

The bulk of discovery activities usually takes place before individuals participate in these other OPWDD services:

* Supported employment (SEMP) provides job support for individuals who have less intensive needs. Often, they come to SEMP after being trained on the job or completing programs like ACCES-VR, which we’ll talk about in a few minutes.
* The Employment Training Program offers paid internships that lead to a permanent job with a community business. Participants go to job readiness classes and receive job coaching. For example, someone might be hired as an employee of a car-washing company after completing a paid internship there.

## Slide 12: OPWDD – Enrollment

Most OPWDD services, including those listed on this slide, are provided through New York State’s Medicaid program. To access OPWDD services, most individuals will need to enroll in Medicaid. You can apply directly to Medicaid or work with an agency that you want to use as a service provider. To get started with OPWDD, you must attend a Front Door information session.

## Slide 13: OPWDD – Medicaid Service Coordination

Medicaid Service Coordinators (MSCs), which will become Care Coordinators or Care Managers in July 2018, will likely play a big role in the lives of individuals who are enrolled in Medicaid-funded OPWDD services. Care Coordinators help access services and supports identified in the Individualized Service Plan (ISP), which will now be referred to as the individual’s Life Plan. The Care Coordinator develops, implements, and maintains the ISP/Life Plan based on the individual’s capacities, needs, and desires. As a key member of the individual’s Circle of Support (a group of people chosen by the individual to help achieve his or her goals) or inter-disciplinary team, the Care Coordinator/Care Manger helps with many tasks, such as finding job opportunities and other ways to meaningfully engage in the community.

OPWDD provides a regional list of staff members best qualified to answer questions about Medicaid Service Coordination requirements. This list can be downloaded through the hyperlink noted on the slide.

## Slide 14: OPWDD – Self-Direction

Individuals and their families may want or need flexibility in services and scheduling. Individuals who choose to self-direct work with their Circle of Support to choose services and discuss funding those services. They may enlist the help of a Support Broker to help with financial matters.

## Slide 15: ACCES-VR

ACCES-VR acts on the belief that all individuals with disabilities should have the opportunity to work in jobs within the community. It helps individuals find and maintain employment, and otherwise live as independently as possible. As noted earlier, many individuals with disabilities transition from ACCES-VR services to OPWDD’s SEMP or ETP.

## Slide 16: ACCES-VR Services

This slide lists the many services ACCES-VR provides. An Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) guides ACCES-VR services and serves as a road map to employment. A vocational rehabilitation counselor helps develop the IPE.

## Slide 17: SSA – PASS

SSA offers work incentive programs that help individuals with disabilities enter the world of work. With Plans to Achieve Self-Support (PASS), individuals at least 15 years old and eligible for SSI can save to pay for education and other things that they may need to work, such as job coaching, transportation, or equipment.

## Slide 18: SSA – Ticket to Work

Individuals between ages 18 through 64 who receive SSA benefits because of a disability may be eligible for Ticket to Work. Participants receive career counseling, vocational rehabilitation, job placement and training, and other job-related services through an Employment Network or state vocational rehabilitation agency.

## Slide 19: Self-Determination

There are many options for employment services, but one thing is not optional: self-determination. Everyone has the right to live the life of their choosing. Encourage the individual to think about what that life looks like and help him or her share that vision with people who can help. Employment and volunteering opportunities should reflect the individual’s interests, dreams, and strengths.

## Slide 20: Explore, Explore, Explore

Listening to this presentation is a good place to start the process of helping an individual with disabilities find meaningful employment. What do you do next? One of the easiest things to do is to call the agencies we discussed or visit their websites. Consider accessing OPWDD’s and CP of NYS’ interactive directories, which identify employment services in your area and provide contact information.

Another course of action you can take right away is to connect the individual’s interests to possible job opportunities. If she is interested in clothes and fashion, take notice of nearby clothing stores. If plants and nature are an interest, seek out landscaping companies. A baseball fan might be able to volunteer for a local sports team. Point out possibilities whenever you are in the community with the individual.

An even more active strategy is to arrange job shadowing for an individual, so that he or she has a good understanding of the responsibilities of a job.

## Slide 21: Other Ways to Prepare

Change can be overwhelming, so be sure to talk with others who have gone or are going through a similar experience. Of course, transition is different for each person and what may not seem risky to one person does to another. Be mindful of an individual’s tolerance for risk, while recognizing that risk often accompanies growth. As long as there is no danger to anyone’s well-being, failing at something new can teach valuable lessons.

The circumstances prompting some transitions, such as closure of a workplace, are out of an individual’s and families’ control. One way to gain control is to break down new skills into small, more manageable steps. Communicating why something is happening and when it will happen can go a long way toward lessening anxiety.

Learning to speak up for oneself—practicing advocacy—can also build a sense of control. Help individuals understand their rights and responsibilities and how to express what they want to others who can help, such as the Care Coordinator, their Circle of Support, and the interdisciplinary team. The government agencies we talked about in this presentation are also there to help. We noted phone numbers for local contacts from each of the agencies on this slide.

Do you have any questions or comments?

# Concluding the PowerPoint Presentation

At the end of the presentation, present a paper copy for families to take home. They should also receive the Preparing for Employment Checklist. Review the checklist with them and answer any questions they have.

1. Meyers-Ruff, C., Thibdeau, L., & Obey, T. *Pathway to Employment MSC Training, September 2014.* PowerPoint presentation. NYS Office of Developmental Disabilities. Accessed at http://www.opwdd.ny.gov/opwdd\_services\_supports/service\_coordination/medicaid\_service\_coordination/resources/training-pathway-to-employment [↑](#footnote-ref-1)