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TITLE: EMPLOYMENT FIRST POLICY

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## Our Commitment

The Missouri Division of Developmental Disabilities along with our partners, including the individuals we support, community provider agencies, other state and local funding agencies are committed to enhancing community employment options for persons with developmental disabilities. The Division believes that all individuals who want to work can work and contribute to their community when given informed choice, opportunity, training, and supports that build upon one's strengths, talents and skills. Our *expectation* is that everyone of working age, and those supporting them, should consider employment as the first option as fully participating community members and develop career pathways consistent with one's preferences and interests.

## Our Vision and Beliefs

Employment is a viable option for all people who want to work.

Beliefs:

- People who want to work can work
- People that are of working age are expected to work
- People have the right to achieve their career goals
- People should earn competitive wages in an integrated setting of their choice
- People should have the opportunity and support to realize economic self-sufficiency and asset development

### History

Individuals with disabilities have been asking and seeking alternatives to current supports and services. Specifically, individuals have been asking for supported and community based employment supports and services. In October 2008, the Division of Developmental Disabilities initiated a statewide employment initiative by joining the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN). The SELN is coordinated by National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services (NASDDDS) and the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts - Boston. The goal of the SELN is to establish a learning community of states interested in improving

employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, support the development of employment policy and strategy, and increase the number of individuals working in individual integrated employment. Each state develops an employment strategic plan which seeks to maximize resources, develop more effective employment systems, use data to guide daily program management, improve performance, and employment outcomes for individuals. The Division has developed a state level employment leadership network to support this process.

The Division's employment leadership network is comprised of self-advocates, family members, community provider agencies, Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council, Missouri Governor's Council on Disability, Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Missouri Division of Workforce Development, Missouri Vocational Rehabilitation, Missouri Rehabilitation Services for the Blind, University of Missouri Kansas City-Institute for Human Development, APSEMO and other state and local agencies, including Senate Bill 40 board members.

As part of a restructuring process, the Division hired a Director of Employment and identified regional Employment First Specialists. This creates a concentrated effort around expanding employment supports coordination, employment outcomes and the Division's employment strategic plan through partnering with local businesses, chambers of commerce and other civic groups.

## **Purpose & Policy**

The guiding purpose for this policy statement is to articulate the vision for employment services/supports for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

This policy establishes community integrated employment services and supports as the first service option and primary outcome for individuals (both youth and adults.) It also establishes employment planning and supports as priorities to explore with all working adults who receive services in order to ensure that supports, services, and outcomes are consistent with what the person is seeking.

Each individual will be supported to pursue his or her own unique path to work, a career, and his or her contribution to/participation in community life. All individuals, regardless of the challenge of their disability, will be afforded an opportunity to pursue employment. Career planning, including job exploration and on-going person focused self discovery, is critical when assisting individuals in making informed choices about their future careers.

## **Policy Implementation**

It is expected that:

- All individuals are informed of all the potential employment related options including self employment.
- Job/Career exploration will be reviewed and offered so the individual can make an informed choice regarding community employment. Mere conversations about employment are not sufficient. Individuals need experiences in order to make informed decisions.
- Community employment planning is a priority to explore with individuals currently receiving services in order to ensure that supports, services, and outcomes are consistent with what the person is seeking.
- On-going career planning is expected to be addressed in the Person Centered Planning Process for all individuals to ensure career advancement opportunities are explored on a regular basis.
- School-aged youth and students transitioning from school will have opportunities for job exploration, work experiences and vocational training.
- The Division will utilize labor market information and identify regional business trends to provide guidance for providers and other stakeholders.
- The Division will support ongoing staff development and professional competencies for all employment support professionals and support coordinators.

## **Policy Review**

- Monitoring and documentation of the effectiveness of services and supports in progressing towards employment outcomes will take place, at a minimum, on an annual basis and during the quarterly review process.
- The Division will develop a comprehensive approach to data collection and management. Data will be used to identify policy objectives, report to stakeholders and track goal accomplishments.

## **Employment Definitions**

*Career Advancement:* Advancing in a job/career that enhances the employment situation, such as upward mobility, increased benefits, increase in pay, change in career direction, etc.

*Career Planning:* A planning process that creates a vision the job seeker has designed to pursue future employment and action steps to achieve the desired outcomes. Input from the job seeker's support team is critical in addressing areas such as connecting to the business community, social security work incentives, preparing for college, transportation, etc.

*Competitive Employment:* Employment which occurs in the community in an integrated setting, amongst co-workers with and without disabilities, where compensation is at or above minimum wage, with similar pay and benefits as others performing similar tasks and .

*Employment Supports:* Services that support individuals to obtain and maintain community employment. Can include but is not limited to career planning, job search activities, facilitating natural supports and on the job supports.

*Working age:* Individuals 16 – 64 years of age

Adopted: January 2011  
Revised: March 2018