BUILDING FRIENDSHIPS
at work

A Toolkit for Employment Specialists, Job Developers and Job Coaches

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I. Introduction

Widening the Circle (Expanding opportunities for friendships between people with and without disabilities) is a project under the auspices of The Arc of Massachusetts, funded by the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS). The project (originally titled "Real Friends"), is focusing on friendships in various settings. Working collaboratively with the Department of Developmental Services and provider agencies across the state, the focus during 2015 and 2016 has been the workplace. The "Building Friendships at Work Toolkit" will help organizations that provide employment supports take better advantage of opportunities to facilitate relationships between the people they support and their co-workers—especially co-workers who do not have disabilities -- in community settings. This effort is timed to supplement the work under DDS' "Employment First" initiative and will be coordinated with other Massachusetts partners such as the Institute for Community Inclusion/ UMass Boston.

This Toolkit is NOT meant to replace the approach you use now in your complex and challenging work! Each section is designed to give helpful suggestions on how you can maximize the chances of meaningful relationships between the people you support and their co-workers at key stages of the employment process.

Widening the Circle is guided by a Project Advisory Committee comprised of people with and without disabilities from every region in the state and with experience in supporting people to develop relationships and training others in this important work. You can find out more about Widening the Circle at **http://thearcofmass.org/programs/widening-the-circle/.**

Special thanks to Richard Hawes, Director of Employment Services at the Berkshire County Arc and member of our Advisory Committee, for his contributions to this Toolkit. Thanks also to Jim Ross and Mary Ann Brennen for their assistance on the toolkit

II. Why Friends at Work Are Important

What mission and/or philosophy are driving your actions as an employment staff member working for a provider agency?

Hopefully, we agree that it is to assist an individual to become integrated or a part of their local community and work place. The recent DDS Employment First initiative clearly states this intent. While it is absolutely critical to assist an individual to secure employment that matches their strengths and preferences, it is just as critical to assist an individual to develop relationships in the work place. The good news is that both can be done!

"Work makes me feel good, it's freedom… I meet new people every day."

(from a self-advocate, quoted in the DDS Employment First PowerPoint)

What are some of the reasons to assist individuals to develop relationships and friends at work?

The very first question we are usually asked when meeting someone new is "What do you do for work?" Our answer often determines whether that initial conversation blossoms into a more meaningful relationship or not. For better or for worse we live in a culture where "We are what we do." Our identity — our worth — is tightly bound to our employment.

Through our research and — more importantly — our conversations with hundreds of people throughout our project, we have identified many benefits to having friends:

- More confidence and greater self-esteem
- Reduced isolation
- Increased social skills
- More opportunities to interact in the community
- Learning (by both parties) from role-modeling by the other
- A sense of belonging

Very importantly:

"People with friends are happier, healthier and safer!"

There are additional benefits to having friends in the workplace:

- People who report having co-workers as friends report higher job satisfaction
- People who have good relationships with their co-workers (and supervisors) are more productive
- There is lower turnover of employees who have close relationships with their co-workers
- "…increased productivity and creativity, heightened morale, enhanced personal performance and stronger team cohesiveness." (Do Benefits of Workplace Friendships Outweigh Risks?; **http://www.businesswire. com/news/home/20100223005305/ en/Benefits-Workplace-Friend- ships-Outweigh-Risks#.U_9QT_ ldW-Y)**

Jody's Story

Jody lost his job in 2010 when the company he had worked for went out of business. Jody grew up in the quaint, small town of Lee -- where everybody knows your name --- so job development naturally started there. A small local business, Dresser Hull Lumber Company, was contacted by employment staff from Berkshire County Arc (BCArc). Knowing Jody's family and that he was a local Lee resident, Dresser Hull carved out a cleaning job for Jody with the assistance of BCArc employment staff. Jody's job responsibilities accentuated Jody's charismatic, fun-loving personality. Employment staff assisted Jody in balancing how to get the job done while talking with customers. Jody would greet customers if he didn't know them already, and became friendly with all the "regulars" that came into the store.

This job turned into more than just cleaning shelves both for Jody and Dresser Hull. As years passed, he quickly became a part of the tight knit group of people at work. Jody was always invited to and attended the company's events; pizza parties, holiday parties, etc. He often attended different local sporting events with his manager, Keith Kelly. Keith also had him over for dinners and family gatherings, and he quickly became a part of Keith's family. A co-worker, Mick Keenan, would also have Jody over for dinners or lunches and Jody became part of Mike's family as well. No one knew that providing Jody with a small cleaning job would result in Jody becoming a part of people's lives both in and outside of work.

Jody had a huge party to celebrate his 50th birthday this past January and the majority of Dresser Hull employees were there to celebrate this milestone with his family and friends. It was a joyous event and people attended because everyone loved Jody and wanted to be a part of his special day.

Sadly and unexpectedly, Jody passed away this past April. This left a void in everyone's heart, not just at Dresser Hull, but in the local Lee community. His funeral services were overflowing with hundreds of people from the local community. When BCArc employment staff talked to the owners of Dresser Hull, Mr. and Mrs. Dick Shields and their son Chris, they stated, "We had a customer base who made it a point to come see Jody just to say 'Hi'. How fortunate we are to be touched by someone of that caliber to broaden our minds and enrich our lives. We are blessed."

Jody truly had a home at Dresser Hull, not just a job.

Person-Centered Career Planning

The potential for relationships to develop in the workplace should be on the radar screen at the very beginning of the planning process you use to help someone find a meaningful job. To be successful, the employment staff must be aware of social needs and preferences of the individual being supported. The greatest correlation to job success is a good job match.

Most organizations know the people they support pretty well. Staff usually conduct assessments to determine the kind of work that best suits the individuals' skills. Assessments typically include, but are not limited to:

- preferred work environment
- type of work tasks the individual is capable of handling and interested in doing
- the schedule the individual can work (often determined by demands on others)
- available transportation
- level of supervision required

"Person-centered planning celebrates, relies on, and finds its sober hope in people's interdependence."

John O'Brien

III.
Tools for Crafting Friendship in the Workplace

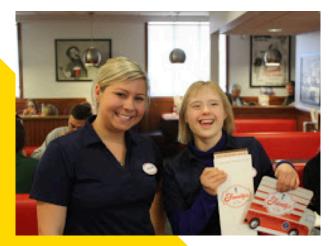## Job/Career Planning & Relationships

While this is a very good way of determining a good job match, we must expand our approach to facilitate a job match that optimizes the maximum integration in a workplace. We need to consider the social needs and preferences of the individual, attributes that contribute directly to job satisfaction, productivity and job retention.

What tools are available to use to develop a good career plan that assists in facilitating relationships in the work place?

1 Utilizing Person-Centered Career Planning (PCP) and building a "Personal Profile" are effective ways to capture lots of information about the individual that can be useful in creating a good match between the individual and a job in the community (see PCP material in appendix). These particular tools probe at issues relevant to the possibilities of relationships in the workplace.

A particularly helpful part of that process is creating a "Relationships Map" (from **http://rtc.umn.edu/docs/pcpmanual1.pdf**) which includes:

- What are the main patterns and themes in the individual's relationships network?
- What areas of relationship are missing? What would be important to build?
- Are there old friends or acquaintances from the past, with whom the focus person would like to reconnect?

Rachel is a Memory Maker at Friendly's in Pembroke. where she helps with many of the restaurant operation's responsibilities.

Courtesy of MA Developmental Disabilities Council

- Are there friends or acquaintances from the community that can be invited to join the planning circle?
- Where could community members who would like to get to know this person be found?

2 Individualized Vocational Assessment - Especially with new referrals, it is imperative to conduct an individualized person-centered assessment of the person's strengths, needs, preferences, and capacity for employment. This assessment should involve career preference lists, interest inventories, background information (from a variety of sources including schools, family, funding sources) and real work experiences. This assessment can range from 20-60 hours. Individuals with little or no work experience and/or with challenging issues may need longer assessment periods. However, the most important part of this assessment process involves the employment staff really getting to know the individual and developing a positive relationship with that person. This will facilitate a good job match and, in turn, higher likelihood of developing relationships in a new job.

3 Career planning process - It is critical to adopt a real person-centered mindset when conducting the career planning process. The planning process itself should not be limited to staff and the people served. Family and friends as well as other community resources should be invited to the table. If the individual receives residential supports from a different organization, those people should be involved also. It is likely that a desirable job with the potential for friendships with co-workers will take coordinated efforts among multiple provider organizations. Having the right people at the planning table better ensures that the process pays attention to opportunities that will enhance the chances of good relationships — including friendships — developing at work. When planning the meeting, the individual must be actively involved in determining where the meeting will beheld, who will be invited, how they will be invited, and what time the meeting will be held. Having food and drink at the beginning can help facilitate open discussion. Also, it is critical that the meeting revolves around the individual and that all questions and discussions be directed to the individual; participants should not just be talking about him or her. Having an action plan to assist the individual securing employment that involves the people attending the meeting is really helpful (i.e., someone using their network to contact an employer).

Joe's Story

Joe acquired a severe head injury at the age of 14 when he was in a Motor Cross race and crashed his motorcycle, leaving him in a wheelchair and having to start the long road to recovery.

Joe was referred for employment services when he turned 22. After completing a vocational assessment, employment staff conducted the person-centered career planning process with Joe and his team. Joe was emphatic about getting a job in the motorcycle business and riding motorcycles again. While employment staff advised Joe that riding motorcycles again was not a good idea, they honored his passion and began looking for work in his desired career choice with motorcycles.

After contacting the local motorcycle shops as well as local auto shops in the area, one very successful company, Ronnie's Cycle shop, knew Joe's history. After much discussion between Joe and his team and Ronnie's, they carved out a part time job. Joe does a myriad of duties including detailing the motorcycles, assisting with inventory, and packaging of products. He loves his job, and they love him.

From cups of coffee in the morning with co-workers, to attending work functions, to assisting in a fundraising annual event, Joe has become part of Ronnie's family for the past 11 years.

Job Development and Relationships

Job Developers already have a complex job. They need to:

- Explore the local community to be thoroughly familiar with job opportunities
- Develop positive relationships with businesses and business groups (i.e., Chambers of Commerce)
- Be good "sales people." Be able to convince employers that the people they support can meet their business needs, convince family members of the benefits of working in the community, and—often—convince the individuals that they are deserving and capable of real jobs alongside other community members.

As employment providers, our mission is to assist an individual to become fully integrated into the workforce. Once the planning process clearly shows the social needs and preferences of an individual, it is important to know what kind of work and *which workplaces* may be the best fit. If an individual is in a good job that he/she likes and is doing well, there is a greater likelihood of relationships being formed.

When a possible job is identified, the employment staff must not only determine the job tasks involved, but all the factors that will help an individual become part of the work place, including work culture.

Rick Hawes
Director of Employment Services
Berkshire County Arc

How can employment staff secure jobs that can facilitate the development of relationships in the work place?

1 Focus on the type of setting and culture of a workplace as defined by HR Insights as:

Culture is the character and personality of your organization. It's what makes your organization unique and is the sum of its values, traditions, beliefs, interactions, behaviors, and attitudes.

For example, in work settings or cultures that have progressive management (i.e. have experience and inclusive philosophy with employees with disabilities), and lower turnover of staff, there is greater stability and a higher likelihood that an individual will develop relationships in that business.

- Good job developers will "do their homework" and identify those businesses that have cultures and settings that match the individual's social needs and preferences.
- Good job developers match the job to the individual, not the individual to the job.
- Additionally, it is far easier to develop relationships in a work culture when the employee is in an individual placement, on company payroll, and a part of the daily routines/structure of the business.

(See appendix for more information on culture)

2 Conduct a thorough job analysis: It is during this initial process that a job developer/employment staff assesses all factors to a good job match that can lead to developing relationships at work.

The following factors should be included when conducting a job analysis to determine if the job is a good match for the individual:

- Core and episodic work routines (i.e. are there intersecting or overlapping tasks with other employees?)
- Scope and type of orientation and initial training of coworkers/company staff (is there a company orientation for all new staff?)
- Availability and willingness of coworkers to assist in work related matters (is there an unwritten lead employee in the business/department that others go to for assistance?)
- Unwritten rules unique to the work setting (i.e., casual Fridays)
- Work site culture of productivity, quality, and social interactions.

Job Developers should maintain profiles and job analyses of local businesses that include not only requirements of the job but workplace culture items such as:

- food and drink routines
- knowing where people gather before work and for breaks
- extent of joking/teasing that happens amongst co-workers
- job sites showing layout, tasks, what people wear, etc.

3 Be an optimist: Determining what a person can do versus what they cannot do is critical to the job development success. If employment staff believe that the individual is capable of job success and developing relationships in the workplace, there is a greater chance of success.

Supporting Relationships in the Early Stages of Employment

Job Coaches have complex jobs that include:

- Teaching the individual so they can complete their job duties
- Travel training or ensuring that a means of transportation has been secured

Job Coaches must embrace the concept that it is just as important for an individual to "fit into the work culture" as it is to perform their duties. True integration into the workforce facilitates both getting the job done and developing relationships at work. In many cases one leads to the other.

How can Job Coaches facilitate developing relationships with co-workers in the workplace?

It is easier for friendships to develop if positive relationships among co-workers are nurtured and supported from the start. There are a number of things that the Job Coach should do to facilitate developing relationships.

Prior to the individual starting at work, the job coach should spend time in the business doing more detailed job analysis. This is in order to not only learn the job routines but also be able to "read" specific aspects of the workplace culture, including but not limited to:

Jan has been a Teacher's Assistant for one year. In this picture, Jan is assisting her students with opening their lunches. Working with children is Jan's passion.

Courtesy of Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council

- Appropriate attire, including any "special days" (i.e. casual Friday).
- The flow of the daily schedule/work routines/ overlapping duties
- Food and drink routine.
- Where people gather at breaks/before work.
- Key co-workers/supervisors for orientation and training.

After the job analysis is done, the job coach and employment team should develop a training plan that incorporates as much natural supports as possible.

- **The first day on the job should be the first day the employment staff begin to fade from the job!**
- Transportation: secure and facilitate transportation that's as typical as possible, including the possibility of carpooling with new co-workers

- Orientation: coordinate with the employer how the individual will be oriented and trained. Try to get the employer to commence doing this on day one. Have individual be oriented just like every other employee.
- Training: utilize current employees whenever possible to help the person you support understand job tasks and culture (i.e., have supervisor or co-worker show individuals how to clock in/out)
- Interactions: facilitate and encourage interaction between the person you support and their co-workers at breaks, lunch, and work time.
- Fading: utilize as many natural supports as possible:
- Identify a "work buddy," a co-worker who understands the individual and agrees to kindly point out when the individual does/says anything that may interfere with inclusion.
- Determine overlapping or intersecting tasks
- Act as consultant and help solve problems with the employer rather than doing it yourself
- Facilitating relationships -- teach or show the individual how to greet people (i.e. saying hello in Spanish), how to make small talk at breaks, and find commonalities with co-workers (i.e., sports, art, music).

Making new friends while succeeding at work!

Remember, if an individual is considered a good reliable employee and does their job well, the individual will gain respect from the co-workers. As a Job Coach, you may need to help the person you support:

- Stay focused and get the job done to the employer's specifications.
- Speak wisely. Don't gossip and talk badly about other workers.
- Set boundaries. The friendship with the boss should be different than the one with colleagues.
- Be mature. Everyone wants to believe they will never be involved in a workplace conflict, but it's not realistic.

Supporting Relationships in–and Beyond–the Workplace Over Time

After a worker has established him or herself as a competent worker and after they have connected with one or more co-workers in a relationship, it is time to consider the "next step." Ideally, relationships developed in the workplace have an impact beyond the worksite and workday.

"Reciprocity" is a key part of real friendships. Both people must be engaged and committed to the relationship and both must get something positive from it. Friendships—like all relationships—require a bit of work. If the individual receives support from more than one organization, it will take some coordination to be successful. Some things to consider:
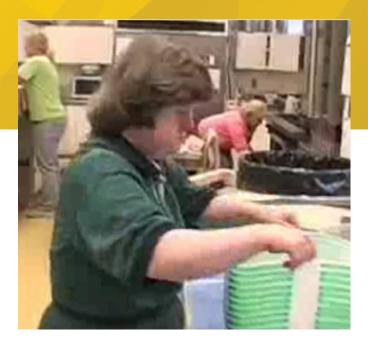
- Do co-workers occasionally or regularly gather somewhere after work (yoga class, weight watchers, local pub, etc.)? How can you support the person you work with to be part of that without being intrusive?
- Does the company have any sports team (softball, bowling, etc.) that the individual can be part of?
- Is the company involved in any charitable activities (Walk for Hunger, Cancer Walk, Habitat for Humanity, United Way Day of Caring, etc.) that the person you support can be part of?
- Can you support the individual to initiate an activity to which he/she can invite his/her co-workers (pot luck supper, Super Bowl bash, whale watch tour, birthday celebration, cookout, etc.)?
- Is there a way to encourage co-workers to consider inviting the individual you support to celebrate certain holidays (Thanksgiving, New Year's Eve, Hanukah, etc.)?

Carrie's Story

Carrie is a woman in her forties who was supported by the Charles River Center (in Massachusetts) and worked in the kitchen of a small private school. This was her first job in the community. She enjoyed reciprocal, caring relationships with several of her co-workers. The natural support of her colleagues enabled her to be successful at her job and form friendships that extended beyond the workday.

Carrie was at her job for several years. Both her mother and her employment specialist noted that she learned the tasks of her co-workers, and was able to fill in for them when one was absent from the kitchen. Her employment specialist has said that she was genuinely surprised and amazed at the skills that Carrie demonstrated while on the job.

Recognition of Carrie demonstrates that her contribution and presence was valued by co-workers, supervisors, and even the children in the school. She received gifts from the principal, including a monogrammed duffel bag, and letters of thanks from the children to whom she served food in the cafeteria. She was also invited on an annual basis to address the children in the school and talk about her life and her job, and answer their questions.

Besides gaining valuable skills, Carrie also developed relationships that extended beyond work. Carrie described times when she had dinner with co-workers after work, and spent time at their homes. There were numerous other examples, including co-workers' attendance at Carrie's 40th birthday party, sporting events of coworkers' children, and agency-sponsored events that coworkers had attended. Working enriched Carrie's life and helped her to develop relationships within a community in which she has a valued role.

Check out the full story and video below to find out more about Carrie.

▶ **http://www.realworksto-ries.org/on-the-job-sup-ports/carrie-natural-sup-ports-at-work**

IV. Appendix

Resources on Person-Centered Planning

Whole Life Planning: A Guide for Organizers and Facilitators by John Butterworth, David Hagner, Bonnie Heikkinen, Sherill Faris, Shirley DeMello, Kirsten McDonough (1993)
Published by the Institute for Community Inclusion
Children's Hospital, University of Massachusetts Boston, Boston, MA
Voice: (617) 287-4300
TTY: (617-287-4350
E-mail: ici@umb.edu
Web site: **www.communityinclusion.org**

Manual **https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED411616**

Listen to Me!, Allen Shea & Associates in collaboration with Michael Smull, Steve Sweet, Claudia Bolton and Pam Lopez Greene
Available from: USARC/PACE
419 Mason, Suite 105
Vacaville, CA 95688
Voice: (707) 448-2283
Web site: **http://www.allenshea.com/listentome.html**

It's Never Too Early, It's Never Too Late: A Booklet About Personal Futures Planning, by Beth Mount and Kay Zwernik (1988).

It's My Choice: Individual
Plans- Individual Employment Plan
Published by the Minnesota Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities
370 Centennial Office Building
658 Cedar Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155
Voice: (651) 296-4018
E-mail: admin.dd@state.mn.us;
Web site: **http://www.mncdd.org/extra/publications.html**

Planning Possible Positive Futures: Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope; by Jack Pearpoint, John O'Brien, Marsha Forest.

Person-Centered Planning with MAPS and PATH, by John O'Brien & Jack Pearpoint
Available from Inclusion Press International
24 Thome Crescent
Toronto, ON., Canada M6H 2S5
Voice: (416) 658-5363
Fax: (416) 658-5067
E-mail: includer@idirect.com
Web site: **http://www.inclusion.com**

Employment Assessment Tool

The Learning Community for Person Centered Practices
Website: **http://tlcpcp.com**

Additional ICI Publications on Person-Centered Planning

Self-Determination: A Fundamental Ingredient of Employment Support
Tools for Inclusion - Issue #22
By: Lora Brugnaro, & Jaimie Ciulla Timmons
http://www.communityinclusion.org/article. php?article_id=205&type=pubtype&id=5

Starting with Me: A Guide to Person-Centered Planning for Job Seekers
Tools for Inclusion - Vol. 10, No. 1
By: Melanie Jordan, & Lara Enein-Donovan
http://www.communityinclusion.org/article. php?article_id=54&type=pubtype&id=5

The Power of Friendship
http://www.communityinclusion.org/article. php?article_id=328&type=pubtype&id=5

More Than Just A Job:
Person-Centered Career Planning
https://www.communityinclusion.org/article. php?article_id=16

For more material on Person-Centered Career Planning, including the forms listed below, go to https://employmentfirstma.org/pages/cp.html
- Click on "Personal Profile Packet" to download PDF
- Work and Life: Likes, Dislikes, Preferences
- What's Working? What's Not Working?
- Job Profile
- Work Environment – What's Important
- Action Plan
- Positive Personal Profile

(Sample from Berkshire County Arc that can be used in developing a career planning personal profile.)

NAME:
REFERRAL AGENCY:
REFERRAL CONTACT PERSON:
EVALUATOR:
EVALUATION DATES:

EMPLOYMENT ASSESSMENT

I. Background and Description: describe background information on the individual including diagnosis, family, medical, social/relationships, past work experiences, desires, preferences, interests and other pertinent information.

II. Evaluation Plan: outline the plan of action to be taken including timelines, work experiences, testing,etc. to be conducted.
Summarize each work experience, job shadow, or test and the results. Include pertinent information to assist in really getting to know the individual's strengths and weaknesses as it pertains to a comprehensive review of work skills, work habits, and social behavior in the work place.

III. Vocational Assets: summarize the individuals strengths.

IV. Limitations to Employability: summarize the individual's weakness in diplomatic practical terms.

V. Conclusions: summarize the person's capacity for employment or need for alternative services.

VI. Recommendations: utilizing a whole-person approach, summarize the recommendations to assist this individual to acquire the skills (including social skills), resources, and services needed to help them become productively employed.

Workplace Culture Assessment Tool

*This link, **https://employmentfirstma.org/pages/ jc.html,** will bring you to a list of resources, some of which are related to workplace culture. These include "Workplace Inclusion Checklist" and "Assessing Workplace Culture Fact Sheet." Clicking "Workplace Culture Survey" will bring you to the "Workplace Culture Assessment Tool."*

THE MEANS USED BY THE EMPLOYER TO TRAIN AND SUPPORT NEW EMPLOYEES

A. DESCRIPTION OF THE COMPANY'S ORIENTATION PROCEDURES

Ask to review any written documents which describe typical orientation procedures. Discuss with a supervisor or decision-maker the flow of typical procedures. Ask employees about their experiences. If possible, and if it is felt to be necessary, ask to be taken through an orientation.

B. DESCRIPTION OF THE COMPANY'S PROCEDURES FOR INITIALLY TRAINING AND SUPPORTING NEW EMPLOYEES

Additionally, ask for training from the employer on at least one of the tasks to be performed by the supported employer. Use this training as an opportunity to assess the capacity and flexibility of the employer in reference to the needs of the supported employee.

C. DESCRIPTION OF SPECIFIC STRATEGIES USED BY THE EMPLOYER

1. Who typically provides new employees with training:
2. Availability of company trainer assigned to employee:
3. Availability of co-workers/supervisors as trainers:
4. Description of strategies used by employer:
5. Important rules stressed by employer and co-workers:
6. Unwritten rules unique to the setting:
7. Potential for use of adaptations/modifications in work site:
8. Willingness of co-workers/supervisors to provide support and assistance:

D. THE "CULTURE" OF THE WORK SITE

1. Employer's concern for quality:
2. Employer's concern/need for productivity:
3. Flexibility/rigidity observed:

Sample Additions to Job Descriptions

Employment provider staff are much more apt to pay attention to supporting the development and maintenance of relationships between the people they support and their co-workers if there is a clear expectation of their job. This job duty should be part of their orientation, it should be covered in their regular employee evaluations and it should be defined in their job descriptions. Below you will find some language that you may want to include in the job descriptions for your various employment staff:

JOB DEVELOPER/EMPLOYMENT SPECIALIST/ CAREER SPECIALIST

Responsibilities:

1. Conduct job development and job search activities directed toward positions that are individualized to the interests and uniqueness of the people on his/her caseload. This includes their interests and strengths related to relationships.

2. Assess workplace cultures in the community to ensure best job placements that maximize the opportunities for meaningful relationships between the people supported and their co-workers.

3. Job coach as necessary for individuals placed in the community. Design and implement plans to fade the coaching as quickly as possible, based on the individual's needs. After the need for coaching fades, visit sites periodically to ensure proper supports are in place and that there are positive relationships with co-workers.

4. Complete all mandatory trainings to ensure skill maintenance and development including trainings on natural supports and relationship building with co-workers.

5. Conduct thorough assessments of individual's skills.

6. Develop goals and strategies with/for individuals to excel in their jobs (including travel training).

JOB COACH

Responsibilities:

1. Provide personal care and assistance to individuals consistent with both their physical needs and de fined support plans. This includes complete familiarity with the profiles and histories of individuals supported, including items related to social and relationship goals.

2. Implement scheduled active programming and trainings for individuals that will enhance their social skills within the culture of their job site.

3. Be alert to opportunities to connect the people served with their co-workers in order to support relationships/friendships.

4. Complete all mandatory trainings to ensure skill maintenance and development including trainings on natural supports and relationship building with co-workers.

5. Proactively assist the individual to attain goals and objectives.

6. Ensure appropriate/adequate supervision and training of individuals.

7. Facilitate social interactions/natural supports within the work environment.

8. Be a positive role model in the work environment for individuals.

9. Utilize good judgment in resolving issues as they arise.

Tips for Inclusion

Natural Supports and Social Inclusion Fact Sheet
https://employmentfirstma.org/pages/jc.html

THE IMPORTANCE OF NATURAL SUPPORTS

"Natural supports" are methods of inclusion and assistance that exist in any given workplace, and that an employee with a disability can tap into. These supports help the person to perform her role, and also to feel socially included—which is crucial for high performance and job retention.

Natural supports can involve people, procedures, customs, tools, and benefits that are typically available in the workplace, along with individualized supports seen as normative within the setting.

Here are some examples of natural supports:

- An employee with a disability takes part in the typical training and "on-boarding" process that all employees go through, with additional support from human resources personnel to complete forms and review the business handbook.
- Coworkers invite the employee to the usual workplace coffee hour, which happens every Tuesday morning from 8:30 to 9:30.
- The employee's supervisor goes over the employee's to-do list every afternoon to keep tabs on what he's accomplished.
- The employee's office mate reminds her when it's time to leave for the afternoon so that she doesn't miss her bus.
- These supports allow an employee with disabilities to engage in social rituals and to become a full member of her workplace. They also help her to strengthen her independence on the job. The supports may be spontaneously generated in the workplace, or they may be facilitated by employment services staff.

All employees (with and without disabilities) seek out help to get their jobs done. For each person, that assistance is based on individualized needs. Figuring out these needs and helping to facilitate appropriate natural supports is imperative as you assist people with disabilities on the job.

SOCIAL INCLUSION: ESSENTIAL FOR HIGH PERFORMANCE

One key aspect of natural supports is that they increase employees' social inclusion at the workplace.

This inclusion is critical for professional success. Could you succeed at your own job if you weren't part of a team, or didn't communicate effectively with your co-workers? Would you stay at your job if you felt socially excluded?

How well you fit in socially at work goes beyond your job satisfaction. It also influences how your supervisor and co-workers view your job performance, and how they approach solving problems you have on the job.

Establishing a natural support network for a worker with disabilities is an important part of your job as an employment professional. It's also fundamental to fading your own support over time.

HOW WORKPLACE INCLUSION HAPPENS

For many people with significant disabilities, social inclusion at work has been a challenge. While our schools, communities, and workplaces are becoming more inclusive of people with disabilities, we still often make assumptions about what they can and cannot do. Many disabilities, including autism, also affect people's social interactions, and can be misunderstood in the workplace.

The good news is that social connections at work can smooth many bumpy interactions. These connections also affect the formal and informal training and support a worker receives.

Here are some steps you can take to ensure that a person with a disability will be fully included in the workplace:

Create the expectation throughout the job development process that the employer will provide training and support for the worker, as they would with any other employee. This can include identifying co-workers who will act as trainers or mentors for the worker with a disability.

If job coaching is part of the support plan, explain to the employer the role of the job coach. The job coach is there to supplement, not substitute for, the supports available within the workplace.

Explain to the employer the importance of social inclusion to the long-term success of the employee.

Discuss the specific support needs of the individual, and how these will be met, in a way that enhances his inclusion, rather than stigmatizing him. Provide functional guidance and information that will invite comfortable interactions. Under what conditions does the new employee do his best work? What are the most effective ways to communicate with him?

Ensure that the area where the person with a disability will be working is not isolated, but is physically integrated into the workplace.

Design the job so that the worker has regular contact and interaction with co-workers.

Have the employee work a similar schedule to others, with the same break times, meal times, etc.

BASIC PRINCIPLES TO KEEP IN MIND

Here are some basic principles to help make sure natural supports function well:

Each workplace has its own culture. Learn the informal rules and norms of each workplace, along with the features and benefits that the business offers. This will help you assist a worker in developing supports and social connections—in other words, fitting in. This includes learning about opportunities such as tuition reimbursement and gym membership, as well as the social rituals of the workplace (breaks, lunch, parties, etc.), and how the worker can participate.

Social integration comes first, not second. Research has shown that new workers first develop social connections, and then master their job responsibilities. It's often those social relationships that help develop natural supports. Social connections also help create the flexibility that allows natural supports to function.

External support has multiple effects on the workplace. The presence of agency staff on the worksite, as well as how you define your role there, influences how the employer and co-workers view and interact with the new employee. Role-model positive interactions, being respectful of the individual and choosing the least intrusive ways to provide assistance.

Ongoing support requires strong business partnerships. As employers and co-workers play a larger role in training and supporting workers with disabilities, your role shifts as well. You become more of a supplementary resource, providing backup and consultation as needed.

CAUTIONS ABOUT NATURAL SUPPORTS

Natural supports can have pitfalls, like any other strategy. Here are some things to watch out for:

Don't impose a new model upon the business. Instead, encourage employers to become more involved, starting with the job development process. You'll be there to support both the employer and the worker throughout the tenure of employment.

Don't use natural supports as an excuse to provide skimpy services, or to withdraw agency support. Natural supports aren't about dumping all responsibility on the employer. A key feature of supported employment is that agency support is long-term.

Don't try to turn co-workers into disability services professionals. Employers and co-workers will often need your expert guidance to understand and interact with a worker with disabilities. They don't need to become disability experts, but they do need to interact with all employees as unique individuals.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Natural supports can help you improve the career experience of the employees with disabilities you serve. They can also be useful as you fade your own presence on the job site over time. So make sure to discuss natural supports with job seekers, new hires, and supervisors.

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