Informed Choice:
*It’s More Than Just Asking*

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COVID-19 PUBLICATIONS & RESOURCES

Resources For Massachusetts
- Massachusetts Employment First COVID-19 Resource List
- Community-Based Day Supports During the Pandemic

ICI Resources
The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) has an ongoing series of publications and resources to help professionals, individuals, and families maintain an Employment First focus through this challenging time. Go to ICI's special COVID-19 web page.

https://covid19.communityinclusion.org
Employment and Employment Supports: A Guide to Ensuring Informed Choices for Individuals with Disabilities

As individuals with disabilities consider their employment options, questions often arise: Does the person want to work in competitive integrated employment? What kind of a job do they want? What are their career interests? And who is really making the decision: Is it the individual, or others on their behalf?

As people with disabilities consider their options and future direction in terms of employment, it is important that they do so within a process that puts them in the driver's seat in terms of decision-making. This process must ensure they have the necessary information to make the choice they feel is the right one for them, embracing not just choice, but informed choice.

But what is “informed choice”? And how do we ensure that a choice is truly “informed” and fully reflective of the individual’s preferences?

This publication answers these questions. In it, we provide a guide to decision-making regarding employment and related services and supports, through a process where individuals understand their options, and make choices and decisions that are fully reflective of their own interests and preferences.

Informed choice is the process of choosing from options based on accurate information, knowledge, and experiences.

Core principles of choice:
- Everyone is capable of making choices.
- Everyone needs support to make informed choices.
- Everyone has the right to make choices.
- Everyone is affected by choices.

Ensuring a choice that is truly informed: Like all of us, individuals with disabilities have the right to make choices over where they work and how they spend their days. However, people with disabilities too often have limited experiences on which to base choices, combined with lives in which well-intended professionals and family members have made choices on their behalf or had undue influence on their decisions.

Studies have found that, when given repeated opportunities to make a choice and not given that choice by others, community individuals with severe disabilities clearly express their vocational preferences, which often differ from what their caregivers recommend or presume is their choice (Martin et al., 2005).

As a result, informed choice requires more than simply asking an individual whether or not they want to work, and it is not a simple yes or no conversation. It requires a deliberate and structured experiential process that puts the individual in a position making a decision, based on their experience and exposure to make a well-informed decision.

Informed choice is not, “Do you want to work. Yes or no?”

What does this mean in terms of employment?
- Individuals with disabilities who are considering their employment and service options should have the opportunity to make fully informed decisions about the options they want to work in integrated community settings.

Tools for Inclusion


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Publication
Available at: www.communityinclusion.org
“Listen to our dreams about having a job. We want to work just like others.”

Stirling Peebles
*Green Mountain Self-Advocates*
DISCUSSION

• What was the decision regarding your current job based on?
• What was the decision regarding your career based on?
Choice
What makes a choice an **informed** choice?
Informed Choice

Definition:
the process of choosing from options based on accurate information, knowledge, and experiences
Informed Choice Requires:

- **SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE IN MAKING CHOICES**
- **EXPERIENCE THAT WE CAN DRAW ON**
- **A CULTURE THAT EMBRACES INFORMED CHOICE**
- **A TOLERANCE FOR REASONABLE RISKS AND FAILURE**
The challenge of informed choice for people with disabilities

- Limited experiences on which to base decisions
- Limited opportunities for choice making
- A culture that too often defers to others regarding individual choices
“Everybody else in life gets the opportunity to make mistakes. You go out on your own, but because disabled people are often sheltered and other people are making decisions for us, we don't have those opportunities to live completely wholly in that way.”

- Andraéa LaVant
  *Impact Producer, Crip Camp*
Experience

Social Expectations

Authority Figures

Peers

Societal Expectations
EXAMPLES OF "UN-INFORMED" CHOICE
Do you want to work in the community?

NOT INFORMED CHOICE
Discussion

Does informed choice mean you can do whatever you want?
People with disabilities are entitled to same level of choice as everyone else.
WHY INFORMED CHOICE MATTERS
It’s the right thing

• Self-determination
• Self-advocacy
• Person-centered planning
WIOA: VR Requirements, Section 511
Steps for Informed Choice & Employment

1. Provide information about benefits of working in an integrated setting
2. Facilitate visits or other experiences in integrated settings
3. Peer-to-peer discussions
4. Identify & address any concerns or objections raised by individual or relevant decision maker
5. Regularly revisit the decision to work in the community
1. **Provide information about the benefits of working in the community**

- What information?
- How should it be provided?
2. **Facilitate visits or other experiences in employment settings**

- Types of experiences
- Ensuring quality experiences and sufficient experiences
- Helping individuals process what they learn
3. Peer-to-Peer Discussions

• **Who?**

• **How?**
4. IDENTIFY AND ADDRESS ANY CONCERNS OR OBJECTIONS RAISED BY THE INDIVIDUAL OR RELEVANT DECISION MAKER

Common objections
• Acknowledge concerns
• Identify strategies for addressing

Responses
5. Regularly revisit a decision not to work in the community

Low-risk strategies to help inform individual and consider employment as an option
Importance of documentation

- Steps to be taken
- Concerns and issues and how they will be addressed
Adapted from:
Informed Choice & Employment, Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2016

INFORMED CHOICE AS A DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS
Choice is more than whether or not you want to work in the community

- Where do you want to work
- What kind of job do you want
- Hours & schedule
- Transportation
- Changing jobs
- Others
Is choosing a less preferred option okay?
Everyone needs to be on the same page
THE ROLE OF FAMILIES

• Understand their role
• Keep them informed about each step
• Respond to concerns
• Remind them

➤ It’s about exploration of options
➤ It’s about the individual’s choices and preferences
The Role of Guardians

- What are the parameters of the guardianship?
- Type and level of relationship with individual?
- Involve guardian, and advocate for support of informed choice
Standards of Practice

Adopted 2000
Fourth Edition - 2013

National Guardianship Association

www.guardianship.org • info@guardianship.org • 877-326-5992
Discussion:
What is the role of professionals?

• Recommend?
• Guide?
• Advise?
• Facilitate?
The role of the professional is to create and facilitate the ideal circumstances for individuals to make their own choices and decisions regarding employment.
Should staff remain neutral?
REQUIRED STAFF SKILLS

• Skilled listening
• Cultural awareness and competency regarding choice-making
• Influence & impact of staff values and personal values on choice-making
• Facilitating empowerment of individuals to direct process
• Managing conflict
• What statements that can help with choice?

• What statements can hinder choice?
Programmatic Considerations

- Culture that encourages informed choice
- Supporting individuals with communication challenges and other support needs
- Ensuring exposure to a variety of work settings to inform process
- Procedures for documentation of process
- Requirements for periodic review of decision not to pursue employment
Informed Choice Factors During Covid

- Risk to themselves and others
- Steps being taken by employer to protect workers
- Impact on employment situation if they choose not to work
- Need for wages from employment
- Level of supports needed by individual and how they can be provided
- Availability of transportation
- Overall implications of working vs. not working for themselves and their job
The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically changed how we think about going to work. While many of us are able to work remotely, many businesses and job functions continue to be essential and must be performed in person. Some people with disabilities are currently working in essential roles and businesses. Others are job seeking and eager to go to work.

Making the decision to continue working or to get a new job during this time requires thoughtful considerations of both the benefits and risks. This guide assists employment service providers in helping people they support determine whether or not they should work, considering both the benefits and the risks. It is not the employment provider’s decision, but one that should be made by the individual in consultation with those they trust and who support them.

1. Individual considerations
- Is the person you are supporting at higher risk for COVID-19?
- Are members of their household at higher risk and would they increase that risk by working outside of the home?
- Is the person you are supporting able to understand and follow the CDC guidance to help prevent the spread of the virus, such as handwashing and social distancing?

2. Work environment
- Has the business adopted policies and procedures to support worker safety?
- Have changes been made to the work environment to increase the safety of employees?
- Are employees provided with or can they bring personal protective equipment such as masks and gloves?
- If the individual is deciding whether to continue working, is the business allowing time off or the option to take a furlough should the person feel it is unsafe for them to work?

3. Support needed for success on the job
- Does the person you are working with need support on the job?
- If yes, can this support be provided remotely?
ICI COVID-19 Resource Page
https://covid19.communityinclusion.org

• 28 publications
• Resource listings
Resources
Holding Engaging Conversations about Work
Toolkit to Support Informed Choice in Employment
Minnesota Department of Human Services
2017 Informed Choice for Employment

This toolkit was developed to help support professionals in helping people with disabilities consider employment as an option and plan for work. The toolkit was developed by the MN Departments of Education, Employment and Economic Development, and Human Services. It is a work in progress. This is just a guide; it is not an all-inclusive list of activities, resources, or tools that will help you facilitate informed choice. You may have other resources, information or tools that you have also found to be helpful. Feel free to use those resources, and let us know about them. Please use the “Give Feedback” button on DB101 to share your thoughts about the toolkit, suggest additional resources, or provide other feedback.

The toolkit contains information, tools and videos about:
- How to prepare yourself to engage a person in conversations about employment
- How to better support people where they are at with work
- Encouraging people to explore employment as an option in the future if they’re not ready today
- Tips on how to help people see competitive work as a possibility
- How to facilitate successful employment outcomes
- Assess your organization’s readiness to support people in competitive, integrated employment

What is informed choice?
- Informed choice means that the person you are supporting is able to make decisions based on complete information that connects to their situation.
- It means that people are given accurate information about what they need to achieve their goals.
- Informed choice occurs when a person understands all of their options and the risks and benefits of their decisions.
- Informed choice is an ongoing process that happens through engaging, person-centered conversations and activities. It is circular and does not occur just one time - it is an ongoing process.

What is my role in informed choice?
Support professionals role in informed choice is to help ensure the person:
- Understands all of their options
SCENARIO 1: PERSON IS INTERESTED IN EMPLOYMENT

PERSON DEMONSTRATES INTEREST IN EMPLOYMENT
- Someone can demonstrate interest in employment through words and/or actions
- Someone can also demonstrate interest in employment through inaction. A person may not be following through with what is asked of him/her as a way to communicate dissatisfaction with his/her current environment and experiences

DISCOVER WHY PERSON WANTS TO WORK
- Has a specific job goal
- Motivated by money
- Motivated by social interactions
- Has a role model who works
- Has participated in paid or unpaid work and enjoyed the experience(s)
- That's what people important to the person are encouraging
- Survival- needs to make money

SUPPORT LEARNING ABOUT AND EXPOSURE TO EMPLOYMENT
- Discuss/observe person’s interests, strengths, and preferences
- Facilitate formal/informal tours of local businesses and support with asking questions about employee roles/responsibilities/qualifications
- Arrange job shadowing at family or friend’s place of business
- Support volunteering in the community
- Support internet research of occupations of interest

EXPLORE OBSTACLES TO EMPLOYMENT AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS
- Major health and/or safety concerns
- Fear of loss of SSI/DI benefits
- Transportation challenges
- Behavioral and/or emotional regulation challenges
- Scheduling concerns of family/caregiver/residential provider/day services provider

Contact DARS
- DARS can also help with exploration
- It’s often best to contact DARS after initial exploration activities have taken place
- Some people who apply may need to participate in DARS-coordinated trial work experiences so DARS can determine eligibility for vocational rehabilitation
### Pathway to Employment

Use the tool below to assist in developing employment-related outcomes for your Service Plan.

#### Path 1: Already Employed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Are you making enough money to meet your living expenses?</td>
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<td>2) Are you working the amount of hours you want to work during the week?</td>
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<td>3) Are you happy / satisfied with the job you have?</td>
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<td>4) Do you want to stay where you are working now?</td>
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<td>5) Do you get the opportunity to try all the different jobs/tasks you’d like at work?</td>
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<td>6) Are you happy with the employment services you are currently receiving/SE provider?</td>
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<tr>
<td>7) Are you happy with your job coach?</td>
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**Are all of the answers “YES”?**

- Determine whether or not employment services are needed to maintain current job.
- If employment services are provided identify areas in which the employee needs support, must improve due to supervisor feedback, wants to improve, etc. and indicate on the Intervention Plan & Service Log. Include these outcomes and any services that are needed to accomplish these outcomes in “Section B: Personally Defined Outcomes” of the Service Plan.

If any answers are “NO” (i.e. you may be underemployed or unsatisfied with your job) --

Identify outcomes related to getting an increase in salary, additional hours, another position/job that will increase the employee’s satisfaction level, etc. and indicate on the Intervention Plan & Service Log if the individual is receiving employment services. Include these outcomes and any services that are needed to accomplish these outcomes in “Section B: Personally Defined Outcomes” of the Service Plan.

Activities you may consider to increase job satisfaction include, but are not limited to:

- Speak with your employer about increasing your hours/salary or about trying other job duties within the company - supported employment services can provide assistance if needed
- Seek alternative employment (part-time or full-time) - supported employment services can provide assistance
- Consider exploring employment options through Career Planning services
- Utilize suggested activities listed under “Path 2.”

**Additional Notes**

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**Pathway to Employment**

State of New Jersey
Department of Human Services
Division of Developmental Disabilities

NJ Division of Developmental Disabilities

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“Presume competence. And what we mean by presuming competence is when you meet a person with a disability you assume they are capable. Don’t assume that someone can or can’t do things but make sure they tell you what they need for accommodations and give them the chance to be in the driver’s seat.”

Max Barrows

Green Mountain Self-Advocates