

Employment First Policy – *What Does This Mean?*

The Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS) has an Employment First Policy.

What does this mean for you if you receive adult services from DDS?

- **Inclusive, individual employment in the community** should be the first service option that is explored and encouraged. Services provided to you should be focused on and lead to inclusive, individual employment.
- **What is Inclusive, Individual Employment?:**
 - It means you have **a job in the community** where you are **hired and paid by the employer** (not your service provider).
 - It means you are working at businesses and in locations in the community where you **work and interact with people without disabilities**.
- You have the **right to receive supports and assistance that will help you obtain individual, inclusive employment in the community or self-employment**. What does this mean?
 - Finding employment based on your interests and what you want to do. The job should fit your skills and abilities as well as your preferred work atmosphere.
 - You should be actively involved in the job search process.
 - You should be allowed opportunities to explore a variety of careers through work sites and other community opportunities.
 - You should be informed about all of your career choices and have the right NOT to be discouraged from any career interest.
 - You should have access to information about public benefits (SSI, SSDI) so you can learn about what will and what will not change once you are employed
 - You should be encouraged to work the maximum number of hours that you are capable of working while earning wages equal to anyone else with that job.
 - You should be provided with job coaching and other supports to help you be successful.
- You may also be assisted to obtain **self-employment** if that is your choice. Self-employment is earning money from your own business. You are not working for and paid by someone else.
- Your parents, guardians, service provider, job developer, etc. should work with you to help you achieve your career goals by making sure your job fits your interests, that you are treated fairly with respect in the workplace, and that you are getting the most out of your job.

Ultimately, you need to be involved in every choice and decision that is made and you have the right to speak up (advocate) when an opportunity does not fit or if you feel you are not being heard.

The full DDS policy can be found at: <https://www.mass.gov/lists/dds-policies>

This document was created by the Self-Advocacy and Self-Determination Work Group of the Massachusetts Partnership for Transition to Employment (MPTE).

