

MOCCE

***Maximizing Opportunities for Customized
Competitive Employment***



***A Manual to Assist Professionals
Working Through Employment Issues
With Persons With Severe Disabilities***



Alabama Department of
REHABILITATION SERVICES

Maximizing Opportunities for
Customized Competitive
Employment

MOCCE
TRAINING MANUAL

INTRODUCTION

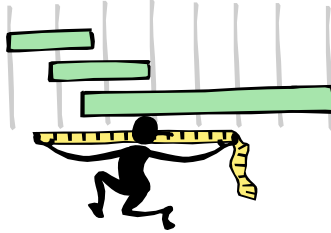
In October 2002, the State of Alabama Independent Living (SAIL) Service, a program of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, received notification of a grant award through the U.S. Department of Labor. The grant was designed to identify barriers to employment for persons with severe disabilities in Alabama. A survey was designed and then distributed to SAIL program participants and participants currently served through other home and community-based waivers. Included in the distribution were the Elderly and Disabled waiver available through both the Alabama Department of Public Health and the Department of Senior Services and the Mental Retardation and Developmentally Delayed waiver sponsored by the Alabama Department of Mental Health/Mental Retardation. From all the waivers, the SAIL Homebound, Independent Living programs, and some disability specific support groups, 881 participants responded to the survey. The results were tabulated and efforts were begun to examine ways to alleviate identified barriers to employment for this population.

A part of the grant activities includes the development of a training module designed to educate professionals working with the severely disabled in employment issues. This training manual will take the most commonly identified barriers and help professionals address each in order to help participants make educated decisions about working.

Although individualization is important when examining career options with this population, this manual will provide information and resources that are vital to all professionals working with persons with severe disabilities. The contact information on all listed resources can be found in the appendices of the manual. This manual will list the most commonly identified barriers and will provide tools necessary to assist with the education of program participants. The premise is that each case manager or professional should possess a working knowledge of employment-related issues to provide any participant with a severe disability the necessary resources, simultaneously allowing waiver professionals to meet Olmstead requirements.

For your information—

RECOGNIZING EMPLOYMENT POTENTIAL



Each person is different and each disability affects differently. Some participants may never be stable enough to enter the workforce. Some disabilities are just too severe and the physical limitations too extreme. However, the most important thing to remember is that if a program participant expresses a desire or interest in returning to work, then a major barrier has just been alleviated. A person desiring to enter employment should not be discouraged due to disability. Options are available to all persons, disabled or not.

Planting the seed of employment soon after a diagnosis is made is important. After a devastating injury or diagnosis is received, persons with disabilities have a period of adjustment to undergo. When mentioning work early on, a person may initially feel unable to go to work, but after the adjustment is made, then reconsideration may occur. But the professional has provided options, thus planting the seed. Periodic reinforcement of the employment option is also important.

***Survey Results:
Barriers to Employment
For People with Severe Disabilities***

FEAR OF LOSING BENEFITS



One of the most common barriers to employment is the fear of losing benefits. Persons with disabilities generally receive some sort of monetary benefit each month.

SSDI

- One benefit may be in the form of Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). This insurance payment is federally mandated and withheld each pay period from a person's paycheck in the form of Federal Income Compensation Act (FICA). It is deposited into an individualized account and is available to each working person who becomes disabled and can no longer work. A person must meet certain requirements established by the Social Security Administration (SSA) before eligibility is determined. Eligibility determination for SSDI can be quite time-consuming and it would be cumbersome for laypersons to remember all the rules governing SSA. Most persons receiving SSDI have paid into the system while working. Spouses can receive benefits from each other at certain ages. Children who become disabled before age 22 years are considered Disabled Adult Children (DAC) and may receive SSDI from a disabled, retired, or deceased parent. In addition, if a parent becomes disabled, children will receive dependent benefits until reaching age 18. Two years and five months after receipt of the first SSDI payment, a disabled person will be covered by Medicare insurance. The dependents, however, will not be covered. Information concerning SSDI benefits can be obtained by accessing the Social Security website at www.ssa.gov or contacting a local SSA office.

SSI

- Supplemental Security Insurance is a state-funded program for low-income or no-income persons. Persons who are disabled and have no other source of income may be eligible for SSI-Disabled. The maximum amount of SSI-Disabled that a person may receive in Alabama is \$564.00 each month. Persons on SSI-Disabled are covered by the state Medicaid program. Some persons may receive SSDI (under \$564.00) and SSI-Disabled benefits and may be covered by Medicare and Medicaid.

Since it sometimes takes years to become eligible to receive either SSDI or SSI-Disabled benefits, persons with disabilities are hesitant to return to work. A fear of loss of benefits is a major concern. Especially

important is the loss of insurance coverage. However, several programs exist that can provide vital information to this population if employment is considered.

Benefits Planning and Outreach Assistance (BPOA)

- One such program is the Benefits Planning and Outreach Assistance available at various locations throughout the state. Benefit specialists in this program talk with the disabled persons about benefits and working. Some work-related expenses are deductible to the disabled persons who work.

One such benefit is the cost of transportation. If a person uses a modified van or automobile to travel to and from work, the mileage could be deductible as a work-related expense. The benefits specialist have been trained to discuss all Impairment-Related Work Expenses (IRWE) as well as other topics with a person in benefit status. The program is entitled “**ALA-WIN**” and has proven to be a valuable tool to persons with disabilities.

ADRS

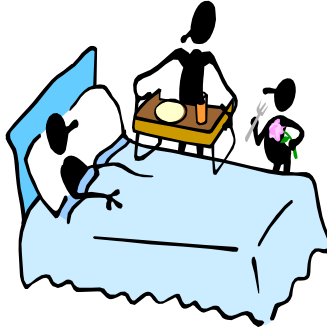
- Another valuable resource available for benefits information is the Social Security specialist employed by the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services. This rehabilitation specialist keeps abreast of any changes as they occur with the Social Security Administration. The Social Security specialist is responsible for informing any interested person with a disability about benefits and employment.

A trial work period is available for nine months following a three-month grace period (12 months total), before a person receiving SSDI would lose benefit status. The program is different for those receiving SSI. For more information about Trial Work Period, consult one of the specialists named above or visit the Social Security website at www.ssa.gov. Available through the website is the **RED BOOK** that lists all the allowable work-related expenses and describes the Trial Work Period in detail.

Alabama is a 1619B state. That means a person with a disability who works and earns no more than the current limit of \$17,348.00 each year could possibly retain Medicaid coverage. The requirements include:

- SSI eligibility prior to employment
- Continually meet the non-disability requirements
- SSI income was lost due to the individual’s earned income
- The individual must need Medicaid in order to work.

DISABILITY TOO SEVERE



Sixty-one percent of persons participating in the survey felt that their disability was too severe for them to enter employment. Although some disabilities limit the person physically and sometimes mentally, there are persons with severe disabilities in Alabama who work 40 hours each week. Persons having a diagnosis of quadriplegia are currently working in both part- and full-time positions. Persons with severe cerebral palsy, mental retardation, spina bifida, and other severe conditions have successfully returned to work.

A person with a severe disability may have the feeling that returning to work is not an option because of the limitations experienced with the disability. The person may not know what kind of work he/she would be able to do. There are several disability specific websites available providing information and support to persons with disabilities. There are also chat rooms where a person with a disability can talk to other disabled persons about a variety of topics, including employment.

The SAIL Independent Living specialists, the Birmingham Independent Living Center, the Independent Living Center of Mobile and the Montgomery Independent Living Center train persons with disabilities to work as volunteer peer supporters. Peer supporters work effectively with others on a variety of issues. Peer supporters who may also be employed may provide information that would encourage another disabled person to go to work. Peer supporters are also available through the Independent Living centers in the state.

The key is to remain as encouraging as possible with participants and to keep abreast of employment opportunities for persons with severe disabilities. There are a number of professional organizations available in communities where membership could help achieve this goal. One in particular is the Alabama Governor's Committee on Employment of People With Disabilities. There are local committees in most Alabama counties.

Another key element is to educate the participant on employment. Equally important is education of the participant's family members. The family may feel that the participant cannot work due to disability. When talking to participants about employment, include family members in the conversation as often as possible. Alleviating fears and uncertainty is vital to successful employment outcomes.

NEED FOR RETRAINING

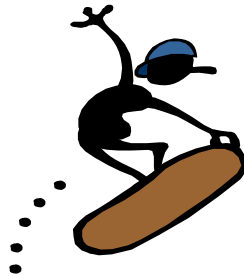


Of those surveyed, 55% revealed that another barrier to employment is retraining. There are several training options available to persons with disabilities.

- The Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services' Vocational Rehabilitation Service, whose primary purpose is rehabilitation and employment of persons with disabilities, is one training option. Retraining may be available through this program. A person with a disability must meet with a vocational rehabilitation counselor, apply for services and meet certain eligibility criteria to receive services.
- Social Security Administration and the Ticket-to-Work Act may be another option. Several other Employment Networks (EN) are offering services for persons with disabilities who have received a "ticket." The ticket is sent to all persons in benefit status who meet eligibility criteria developed by the SSA. MAXIMUS is the contracted entity that is overseeing the Ticket-to-Work program for the Social Security Administration. A list of employment networks that are available in each state can be found at www.yourtickettowork.com. A list of the services offered by each Employment Network can also be found on the website. Please note, however, that each Employment Network works individually with disabled persons and can refuse to work with any. Additional information about this program is available through the Alabama Medicaid Agency's Ticket-To-Work/Medicaid Infrastructure Grant personnel.
- Alabama Career System (One-Stop centers) is another valuable resource for persons with disabilities who may need retraining. Training funds are available to persons with or without a disability. Career centers are housed together with state employment offices. The career centers offer a wide array of services for persons seeking employment, including resume' writing, job-readiness classes, adult basic education classes, interest inventories, aptitude testing and others. Local site information can be obtained by visiting the Alabama Department of Industrial Relations website at www.alabama.dir.gov.
- Alabama Customized Employment Grant funded through the U. S. Department of Labor has placed two customized employment specialists (CES) in two of the career centers to work with persons with severe disabilities interested in returning to work. The demonstration sites are located in the Montgomery and Anniston Career centers. The CES assists participants by individualizing employment opportunities through person-centered planning, vocational evaluation, and career exploration. The specialist can carve employment opportunities for participants. This is a holistic approach to employment. More information concerning this program can be obtained by contacting one of the grant employees.

Vocational testing may be indicated for some persons with a disability. This includes aptitude, interests and physical endurance or agility testing. All combined information provides the person with a disability and his/her employment professional with valuable information concerning work-related goals, objectives and desires. Vocational testing is normally the starting place for many professionals working with this population. Interest tests are also available through most colleges and universities at the career centers. On-line testing is available, but most websites reviewed charge a fee for the service.

TRANSPORTATION



The survey asked persons responding to write in any other individual barriers to employment. Results indicate the number one answer was transportation.

Alabama has some reliable transportation systems in existence in some metropolitan areas; however, a unified statewide system does not exist. Information concerning transportation availability can be found by contacting the Chamber of Commerce or the Council on Aging located in each county.

PAS

Participants served by the SAIL waiver who are working qualify for Personal Assistance Services (PAS). This service allows the personal assistant to transport a working participant to and from the work site. The personal assistant transports the participant in the participant's vehicle and can assist the participant to restroom breaks, provide drinks, food and other personal needs while the participant is at work. Each participant's needs are assessed and the number of PAS hours varies individually. Each participant must meet waiver medical and financial eligibility criteria.

HOME-BASED EMPLOYMENT

Home-based employment or self-employment could be an option for persons with severe disabilities. Home-based employment is exactly that, employment based at home. Self-employment could be based outside the participant's home.

PASS

Another program that could be utilized by this population is the Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS) available through the Social Security Administration as a work incentive for SSI. To be eligible for PASS an individual must receive disability benefits from Social Security or another source. The individual can set aside money for a work goal and the money can only be used to pay for the goal. The income that is set aside in a PASS plan can be used for such things as vocational training, education, purchasing a vehicle, starting a business or work-related equipment. The person must have a specific work goal and a work plan. The plan is completed and sent to the SSA for approval. A PASS cadre is available to assist anyone with questions or completing the plan.

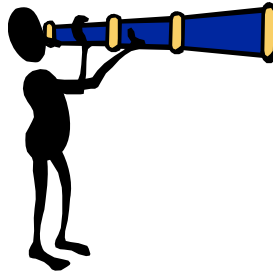
The PASS plan works like this. If a person is interested in purchasing a vehicle for transportation to and from work, then a plan can be developed. The plan must focus on employment outcome or the person must want the vehicle to travel to and from work.

SMALL BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

Another option is utilization of the Small Business Administration. Individuals working with the SBA are available at most colleges and universities throughout the state. The

SBA professionals can counsel and help develop a business plan as well as assist in locating funding sources through federal resources. More information is available at www.sba.gov.

LACK OF JOBS IN RURAL AREAS



Another barrier to employment for persons with severe disabilities is the lack of available jobs in rural areas.

A number of persons with disabilities live in rural areas where there are a limited number of employers able to hire. This presents difficulties when employment is a consideration. The lack of availability of employers in rural areas definitely can be a deterrent. Therefore, the information provided previously concerning home-based or self-employment becomes important for persons in rural areas. The person with a disability may want to consider contacting a local state representative to discuss improvements that can be made in the current state system. Specific improvements could be suggesting tax incentives for employers who hire persons with severe disabilities and also offering tax incentives for first-time business owners who want to be self-employed.

Self-employment could be an option for those living in rural areas. Through a grant funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, Easter Seals Central Alabama offers a Micro Enterprise Program. This program is designed to assist persons with disabilities in the development of a self-employment plan. Each person involved in this program is required to research in detail the business that he wishes to begin. The program has other requirements that must be met, including classes that must be attended and completed. If all requirements are met, a business plan is developed, written and published for presentation for approval. The approving group is comprised of businessmen and financiers who meet and review the business plan. The participant meets with this group and explains the plan and answers any questions that may arise. If the plan is approved, then the Micro Enterprise Program could help with the beginning cost of the business. The program can currently loan the start-up costs for 10 businesses each year. The maximum amount of \$4,000.00 could be loaned to assist with these costs. This program is available to the disabled population statewide. Although every effort is made to get the interested participant to Montgomery where the facility is located, the Micro Enterprise specialists working with the facility will travel to the home as a last resort.

DISABILITY- RELATED HEALTH ISSUES

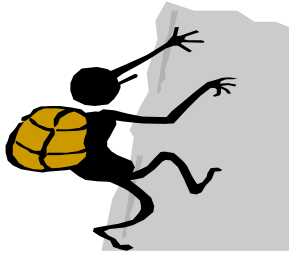


Disability-related health issues was identified as another barrier to employment for some persons with severe disabilities.

Persons with severe disabilities sometimes have other secondary health problems associated with the primary one. Some of the secondary diagnoses can become quite severe and the recovery time lengthy. Severe urinary tract infections or skin breakdowns are possibilities for those who are paralyzed due to a primary diagnosis. The reality of these secondary diagnoses can influence a decision about entering employment. The person with a disability may feel that a secondary condition may prevent successful employment.

As a professional it is important to be encouraging and supportive when discussing employment. There are chat rooms and websites available on the Internet that can provide information for persons in this situation. Also available are other persons with the same disability who are employed and can answer questions regarding secondary problems. These "peer-supporters" can explain how situations regarding disability-related health problems have been handled with employers.

WORK SITE ACCESSIBILITY



Persons with disabilities may find it difficult to access places of employment and business where they may want to complete an application for employment. The suggestion for this situation would be to talk with the owners of the company directly about the concern for lack of access. Persons with disabilities should approach the owner with an appropriate attitude and make the suggestions.

Once employment is secured, the person with a disability may need on-the-job accommodations that will make the work place more accessible and could increase productivity. The person should ask the employer for the accommodations to be made. There are tax incentives for employers who make accommodations. If the employee is a Vocational Rehabilitation Service client, then the vocational rehabilitation counselor could pay for the costs of the accommodations. The vocational rehabilitation counselor would rely on the recommendations made by the rehabilitation technology specialist employed by the department. The rehabilitation technology specialist would visit the work site and make recommendations to the counselor concerning appropriate accommodations. Most accommodations cost less than \$500.00.

The Job Accommodation Network, JANweb, is also available online for suggestions and information regarding work site accommodations. Another valuable resource is www.worksupport.com, which provides valuable information about accommodations and assistive technology.

GENERAL INFORMATION



For professionals working with persons with significant disabilities, all the information concerning work cannot be placed into a single manual. The topics covered in this manual have been designed to assist professionals in securing the resources needed when clients have questions concerning employment. The list is endless, but the following resource guide should assist professionals in providing adequate information to clients in order for them to make an educated decision about work.

Customizing employment is the desired approach when working with the severely disabled population. Customizing includes person-centered planning with the participant to ensure that desires, interests and abilities are taken into consideration in career exploration. It involves all persons involved with the participant—for example, case managers, family, support persons and the person with the disability. The customized approach supports the idea that each person has a choice about careers and it ensures that the stereotypical jobs are avoided. Each person is different, disabled or not, and individualization is the key to successful placement in employment.

It is important to remember to talk with the person with a disability periodically about working. Following-up can be vital. There are numerous resources available for a person with a disability who is interested in working. Professionals should encourage work because it provides an outlet for the disabled person. It improves self-esteem.

RESOURCES

The following are listed as they appear in this manual.

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION	1-800-772-1213 or www.ssa.gov
ALA-WIN	1-866-869-3290 1-888-737-2032 (TDD) www.alawin.org
ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION SERVICES, SOCIAL SECURITY SPECIALIST	1-800-441-7607
STATE OF ALABAMA INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM SPECIALIST (STATE OFFICE)	1-800-441-7607
Anniston	1-800-671-6834
Decatur	1-800-671-6838
Dothan	1-800-275-0132
Homewood	1-800-671-6837
Mobile	1-888-388-3245
Montgomery	1-800-441-7578
Tuscaloosa	1-800-331-5562
BIRMINGHAM INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTER	1-205-251-2235 1-205-251-0605 1-205-254-7333 TDD e-mail: bilc@bellsouth.net
INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTER OF MOBILE	1-251-460-0301 1-251-460-2872 TDD e-mail: ilcmobile.org
MONTGOMERY CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING	1-334-240-2520 711-334-240-2520 TDD www.birminghamilc.org
GOVERNOR'S COMMITTEE ON EMPLOYMENT OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES	1-334-613-2215
ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION SERVICES-STATE OFFICE	1-800-441-7607

ALABAMA MEDICAID AGENCY	1-800-362-1504	
ALABAMA MEDICAID TICKET-TO-WORK MEDICAID INFRASTRUCTURE GRANT	1-334-353-4383	
Northeast Coordinator	1-256-549-7721	
Southwest Coordinator	1-251-472-4389	
Northwest Coordinator	1-205-391-6780	
North Central Coordinator	1-205-414-9433	
Southeast Coordinator	1-334-242-5658	
ONE STOP CAREER CENTERS	1-877-872-5627	
ALABAMA CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT SPECIALISTS		
Anniston	1-256-835-1597	
Montgomery	1-334-288-0249	
ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF SENIOR SERVICES-COUNCIL ON AGING	1-800-243-5463	
ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION SERVICES STATE OF ALABAMA INDEPENDENT LIVING WAIVER	1-800-441-7607	
PASS CADRE	1-800-254-9489	
ALABAMA CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT MICRO ENTERPRISE PROGRAM CENTRAL ALABAMA EASTER SEALS REHABILITATION FACILITY	1-334-288-0240 284	Ext.

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2129 East South Boulevard
Montgomery, AL 36116
(334) 281-8780
www.rehab.state.al.us*

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