

Monthly tips and resources for young adults, their families, and supporters who are exploring options for life after high school in Indiana.

Evolution of Disability Employment

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As you complete high school and move toward adult life, it's time to think about employment, education, and independent living. It's also time for families to think about those life goal areas for their son or daughter. The employment landscape for people with disabilities is undergoing a dramatic change in Indiana and across the U.S. Understanding these changes will give you the information you need to make choices that best fit your goals.

People with disabilities have the right to work in inclusive settings and earn a competitive wage like everyone else. Indiana's Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services (DDRS) has a goal to increase the competitive employment job rate for people with disabilities from 23% to 38% by 2027. To help reach this goal, DDRS will remove sheltered employment as a service option paid through Medicaid. So, for young people with disabilities in Indiana, the option to enter sheltered employment will soon be unavailable.

Sheltered Employment

Sheltered employment, or subminimum wage work, is work in segregated environments (working only with other people who have disabilities) for less than the federal minimum wage. Sheltered employment was intended to increase work readiness and create employment for people with disabilities; however, experts now think this is not the best option. Research shows that sheltered employment can isolate a person and often pays the person attending sheltered programs a very low wage—close to \$2 per hour. Paying less than minimum wage, along with working in a segregated environment, can result in problems. These problems include financial dependency, limited work

opportunities, and fewer relationships in your local community. Research also finds no evidence to support the need for paying people with disabilities a subminimum wage, and there are no benefits for individuals with disabilities when they are paid less than the federal minimum wage.

Competitive, Integrated Employment

Unlike sheltered employment, competitive, integrated employment (working alongside others without disabilities and being paid a minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour or higher) can provide a better outcome. This is often called community employment because you are working in a business in your community or you may be self-employed. While you may have job support from an adult service provider, you will also be paid the same wage and benefits as other co-workers doing the same or similar job as you. Community work gives you social connection, overall well-being, and good quality of life. Individuals with disabilities have a variety of service options to help them find and maintain community employment.

Some of these service options can be found at your local Vocational Rehabilitation office or adult disability service provider agency. These agencies provide supported employment, meaning they can help you find and keep a job that you like. Finding the job you like begins by discovering your interests, skills, preferences, and support needs. Once this is known, staff will start a job search based on what they learned about you and your career or work interests. Agencies may also provide workplace support, like helping you to understand the expectations of the job and how to do it.

Community employment might also mean that the agency staff negotiate a job that is designed and built just for you and your skill sets. When this happens, it is called customized employment. Customized employment involves matching the skills of the job seeker to the needs of the business.

Indiana's transition from sheltered to competitive, integrated employment is a vital step towards inclusive and fair work for individuals with disabilities. As these changes take effect, young adults, their families, and support networks need to stay informed and engaged with the supports available in each community.

Resources

- Office of Disability Employment Policy: [Defining CIE](#)
- Virginia Commonwealth University: [What is Supported Employment](#)
- Center on Community Living and Careers: [Supported and Customized Employment](#)

What's Next? is a project of the Center on Community Living and Careers.

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