

Community Employment versus Day Treatment: Some Facts to Consider

What is a Sheltered Workshop?

A Sheltered Workshop is a segregated employment setting that exclusively employs people with disabilities or where people with disabilities work separately from others. The tasks that individuals with disabilities perform in sheltered workshops are generally rote and mundane, and offer little, if any, skill development, training or advancement. These segregated work experiences rarely result in transition to community work environments.

What is “integrated employment”?

Integrated employment is a real job in a community business setting where employees work alongside non-disabled co-workers and earn at least minimum wage.

What is Supported Employment?

Under the Supported Employment model, individualized supports are provided by a job coach and/or co-workers, as needed, to workers with disabilities who are earn competitive wages (i.e., at least minimum wage). Individualized supports are eventually replaced with natural supports available within the work setting.

Are there differences in compensation for persons who work in Sheltered Workshops instead of integrated, Supported Employment?

Yes. Because of exceptions in wage and hour laws, workers confined to Sheltered Workshops can be and typically are paid sub-minimum wage. By contrast, workers in Supported Employment tend to earn minimum wage or greater.

How does Supported Employment assist individuals with disabilities?

Federal funds channeled through state agencies are used to train individuals with disabilities to work in integrated community employment setting. Supported Employment services include assessment of abilities and interests as well as identification of support needs. This information is used to find jobs working for community employers that "match" the job seekers employment preferences while taking into account the learning and ongoing supports required for the job seeker to be successful at the job site, long-term. These services are typically provided through "job coaching". Long-term follow-up is an important component of Supported Employment. Long-term follow-up ensures that a job seeker continues to flourish in the community employment setting and/or that additional supports and services are applied as needed to ensure continued satisfaction of the employee and employer. Generally, the success of long-term follow-up efforts hinges on the extent to which the job coach has identified and arranged "natural supports" for the employee to be available.

What are the cost implications for ending reliance on sheltered workshops and moving toward integrated, supported employment?

Exact figures are not available for this fact sheet. However, Louisiana spends millions of dollars on Sheltered Workshops and Day Treatment services each year. Research suggests that in the long run, it would cost less to provide services that result in community employment than to continue to fund Sheltered Workshops and Day Treatment options. An analysis by the Oregon Department of Human Resources Office of Developmental Disability Services concluded that Sheltered Workshops cost as much as three times more than Supported Employment. Other studies support this finding, and show that any increased upfront costs in the transition from

Sheltered Workshops to Supported Employment are offset in the long run and savings are achieved.

Given the current economy, is Supported Employment realistic?

Yes. Across the country, Supported Employment programs are viable. Most Supported Employment jobs are in the service sector – not in the manufacturing sector that has suffered more job losses due to the economy. Also many Supported Employment jobs are part-time or entry-level positions that can be sustained despite current economic conditions.