

INDEPENDENCE ASSOCIATION HCBS Policy: 004**Title: EMPLOYMENT FIRST AND SUPPORTING INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT POLICY****Date: May 16, 2022****Policy:**

During the individual's admission and annually thereafter during their PCP, Independence Association (IA) will determine if the individual is interested in pursuing competitive integrated employment, supported self-employment, or volunteer work in the community. Independence Association (IA) supports and is committed to the tenets of the Employment First Maine Act (MRS Title 26, Chapter 41, §3402) which is an act to offer the person served *as the first and preferred service or support option, a choice of employment services that will support the acquisition by the person of integrated community-based employment or customized employment*. IA also supports §3403 of the same act that states *Nothing in this chapter may be construed to require a person with a disability who receives services from a state agency to accept employment services from that state agency or to experience a loss of services as a result of choosing not to explore employment options*. IA supports individuals in both traditional competitive integrated employment and supported self-employment options.

All IA settings are committed to supporting individuals who are not working in integrated community employment, to regularly (at minimum monthly) receive opportunities to formally or informally explore integrated community employment as an option for them, either in the normal course of service delivery or through individually arranged opportunities (i.e. assist individuals to learn about and explore careers/jobs with businesses in the local area as they are supported to participate in their local communities as part of routine service delivery)

Procedure: IA is committed to supporting the individuals served in obtaining employment through providing knowledge and resources about employment options and assisting individuals in understanding their different employment opportunities. IA is committed to exploring all types of employment to the people supported in our programs. Traditional integrated employment and supported self-employment are options that will be made available to people supported in addition to the provision of opportunities to volunteer at local community organizations in the community.

A. Training:

1. IA staff will be trained in the principles of Employment First, the contents of this policy, and the importance of facilitating opportunities to interact with members of the community, upon hire and annually thereafter.
2. Staff will be trained on this policy
3. Training topics include, but are not limited to:
 - a. Employment First values and practices;
 - b. Employment First laws and expectations for the State/Agency and their contracted providers including:
 - benefits of integrated community employment for individuals served;
 - presumption of all people with disabilities' ability to work in integrated community employment with right job match and supports;
 - success stories;

- best practices that lead to success including career/job exploration, informational interviews, discovery instead of vocational assessment/evaluation, customized employment, supported employment, and supported self-employment;
 - work incentives and importance of good benefit counseling to get people facts about how they can work in integrated community employment.
4. If a participant is adamant that they do not wish to pursue a job or supported self-employment, staff will only inquire about this subject annually at the PCP or if the individual broaches the topic.
 5. People not desirous of work or self-employment will be asked to sign an affidavit attesting to their decision.
 6. All Community Supports programs will ensure community based opportunities include volunteer opportunities, soft skill development and career exploration.
 7. When a participant is desirous of integrated employment of supported self-employment, staff will document it in their respective Electronic Health Record (EHR), and the program manager will notify the participant's case manager to facilitate enrollment in vocational rehabilitation and select a supported employment agency.

B. Job Club:

1. Individuals expressing interest in training to seek employment may attend the IA Job Club.
2. The purpose of the Job Club will be to create a group of individual job seekers, working together under the instruction and encouragement of a leader who provides support, information, facilities, and supplies to prepare participants to interview for a job that compliments the individual's strengths.
3. Anyone may participate in the IA Job Club. Supports for employment-exploration are not predicated on participation in the IA Job Club.
4. Participants of job club participate in structured activities on topics such as job search, career development, and successful workplace skills. •
5. Job Club members will have opportunities to formally or informally explore integrated competitive employment.
6. This will include the development of business partnerships that allow job shadowing, business tours, and informational interviews as part of career exploration.
7. Staff will document all formal/informal experiences in the respective EHR, and share any interest expressed by the individual to the case manager in a timely manner.
8. Employment options will be reviewed with individuals annually at their Person Centered Planning (PCP) meeting, and during quarterly meeting updates.
9. At any time during an individual's participation in their job club, referrals may be made to partner agencies, such as the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, and other partner agencies who specialize in job placement based on an individual's need and desire relating to employment.
10. Staff will be trained on how to regularly provide opportunities to individuals served to help broaden their understanding on possible employment options.
 - a. This includes calling attention to and discussing work performed by others while in the community,
 - b. Discussion of what an individual has for interests and how that could equate to an employment opportunity,
 - c. How an individual could earn money, attending local job fairs, searching employment opportunity websites, and filling out applications for employment.

11. For individuals who are employed, staff will regularly engage with the individual on how work is going, to include problem solving if there are difficulties, and recognition for accomplishments. If there are concerns about performance counseling or loss of employment for the individual, staff will discuss this with the individual and review with their manager so that the issues can be addressed in a timely manner with personnel involved with Work Supports, Vocational Rehabilitation, and/or the employer.
12. Staff support for employed/working individuals will be flexible and provided as needed.
13. Flexible transportation will be provided to accommodate individuals' work schedules (see Transportation Policy).
14. All formal and informal work opportunities provided to individuals served will be acted upon immediately, if applicable and desired. This will be documented in the individual's Electronic Health Record (EHR) Additionally, these opportunities will be reviewed with the case manager, at the annual PCP meeting, and as indicated.

C. Supported Self Employment

1. IA will also explore the possibility of supported self-employment to participants served.
2. Supported Self-employment offers employment flexibility for individuals with disabilities that cannot be found when working for someone else.
 - a. The individual business owner is able to adjust work hours depending upon how they are feeling on a particular day. They can work more when feeling good and work less or take a day off when disability issues create problems.
 - b. Being self-employed provides income, feelings of independence and gratification by feeling needed and wanted while providing valuable service(s) or product(s) for the business customers.
3. If participants are interested in self-employment, IA staff are dedicated to support individuals determine if their self-employment goal is feasible, a good fit for their skills, interests, proposed market area, and disability issues.

D. Supported Employment Services

1. IA does not provide Supported Employment Services or career planning.
2. When identified IA will immediately contact the case manager, the Maine Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and a partner agency who provides Supported Employment of a participant's desire to pursue a job or self-employment.
3. IA will seek out peer agencies who do provide Supported Employment and establish a MOU as a bridge between the setting and an agency who can obtain and maintain employment for any interested person.
4. When an individual supported by IA is successful in landing a job, IA is willing to provide "Long Term Work Supports" to assist the individual to maintain their job, if the individual chooses us to support them.

E. Volunteer Opportunities

1. The range of available volunteer opportunities will be shared with each individual served whenever a service implementation plan is developed or updated.
2. Throughout the year, individuals served will be given the opportunity to do "tasters" of the various volunteer opportunities available to experience them first-hand for a short time and decide if they want to do them on a more regular basis.

F. Leadership

1. IA will establish annual goals to increase the number of people participating in competitive integrated employment or pursuing supported self-employment.
2. Community Supports Programs will maintain a listing of all people who are in competitive integrated employment or supported self-employment and attempt to persuade those not involved in any type of employment to consider employment or volunteering opportunities.
3. It is the goal of IA to develop interest in employment through participation in Job Club activities.
4. The IA Quality Assurance committee will track the number of participants who are employed, self-employed, actively volunteering, and those not interested in employment with a goal to increase employment amongst those people served.
5. IA will respect the decision of people who invoke their right to not work by asking them to sign an affidavit attesting to their decision.