

## What is Employment First?

Employment First prioritizes employment as the first and preferred outcome in the provision of publicly funded services for all working age individuals with disabilities, regardless of the level of disability.

### Why is Employment First important?

All individuals, regardless of disability, can work. We all have the right to use our talents, skills, and interests to earn a living wage in a job of our choosing. Employment opens the doorway to a meaningful life, full inclusion and financial independence. Employment also offers us the opportunity to form meaningful relationships and contribute to our communities. The ability to take full advantage of what employment offers, and the supports that exist to get and keep a job, should be available regardless of disability.

***Employment First is the presumption that all working age adults and youth with disabilities can, and should, be working side-by-side with co-workers without disabilities, earning minimum wage or higher.***

Just like anyone else entering and participating in the workforce, employees with disabilities may require assistance and support to ensure job success and should have access to a system that provides them. To achieve Employment First, we must have clear public policies and practices that ensure employment of individuals with disabilities within the general workforce is the priority for public funding and service delivery. Inclusion or exclusion of the specific term “Employment First” does not determine whether a public system or agency has adopted Employment First principles. Such a determination can only be made in examining whether the underlying policies, procedures and infrastructure are designed for and ultimately result in increased integrated employment in the general workforce for individuals with disabilities.

### What does Employment First look like?

- Employment is the first and preferred option when exploring goals and a life path for working age individuals with disabilities.
- Individuals with disabilities are employed within the general workforce, regardless of the severity of disability and assistance required.
- There are measurable increases in employment of individuals with disabilities within the general workforce, earning minimum wage or higher with benefits.
- Funding is sufficient so that quality services and supports are available as needed for long-term employment success.
- Individuals with disabilities have increased incomes, financial assets, and economic wealth.
- Individuals with disabilities have greater opportunities to advance in their careers by taking full advantage of their individual strengths and talents.
- Employers universally view individuals with disabilities as an integral part of their workforce, and include people with disabilities within general recruitment and hiring efforts as standard practice.
- Young people with disabilities have work experiences that are typical of other teenagers and young adults.
- Greater opportunities exist for individuals with disabilities to pursue self-employment and the development of microenterprises.
- A decision not to consider employment in the community for an individual is re-evaluated on a regular basis; the reasons and rationale for this decision are fully documented and addressed in service provision.