



What is a Quality Supported Employment Program?

If you want a job in the community, here are some guide lines for deciding whether a program is the right one for you. No program is going to meet all these perfectly, but programs should recognize these as important things they should work toward.

Eligibility

Everyone has the right to a job in the community, without regard to label or severity of disability.

Individual Choice

The individual receiving services helps decide what services are provided, how they are provided, and which staff provides them.

Service Setting

Services are provided in integrated community settings (e.g., businesses in the community), with the chance to spend time, communicate and develop friendships with people without disabilities. Services respect and try to accommodate diverse cultural and linguistic preferences.

Assessment

Assessment (evaluation) is not done to figure out "what's wrong" and how to "fix it," or to see if the person is "ready" to work. The agency helps the person figure out their dreams, hopes, interests and capabilities. Jobs and support services are developed in response to what the person wants and needs. Community settings (i.e., real employers) are used for all assessments.

Service and Placement Design

Rather than "fitting" people into existing programs, people are helped to find their own jobs (not group situations), and are paid directly by the employer at the competitive wage for the job. For example, a program may give options such as, "You can go in our janitorial training or food service training program" or "You can go to our enclave at the supermarket or the packaging company." What they should be saying is, "Let's find out what kind of job you would really be happy doing, and we'll help you find it."

Use of Community Resources

The program makes every effort to help people use services and resources used by all community members (people with and without disabilities). "Special" services for people with disabilities (such as special transportation) are used only when there are no other possibilities. For example, a person who wants to learn office skills or English as a second language would be provided help to take a course at the local community college, rather than receiving the training from a disability agency.

Behavior Challenges

A good provider realizes that people have a right to work in the community, even if they act differently or have behavior problems. Instead of controlling or modifying behavior before a person is given a chance at a job, emphasis is placed on matching the person in a situation which meets their needs and/ or lessens the impact of the behavior. People are placed in jobs where their behavior is acceptable (e.g., an individual who speaks in a loud tone of voice is placed in an active, noisy work environment), in places which will not cause behavior problems (e.g., an individual with a compulsive eating disorder is placed in a job with no access to food), or simply in environments where they are given more control, thus reducing problem behavior over time.

Training and Staff Role

Training is done to the fullest extent possible by the employer. Agency staff see their role as providing consultation to supervisors, co-workers and other community members, to help the person with a disability succeed on the job. Staff do not replace typical employer training and support, but only add to it if necessary.