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Assisting Members with ASD with Employment Support

- **The Employment Specialist Role**
- **Job Development Strategies**
- **Situational Assessments**
- **Important Guidelines**

- Ensuring that quality training is provided
- Fine-tuning job supports and accommodations
- Being available if supervisors or coworkers have a question
- Serving as liaison between work and home—the worker with ASD may be stable at work, but something may happen at home which may call upon the need for additional support.
 - **The employer has no way to know how to interpret the worker's anxiety or anger without some communication assistance.
- Maximizing facilitation of natural supports and social inclusion

- **Career Exploration.** Many individuals with ASD may have to go through an extensive career exploration process, especially those with limited employment exposure and experience. Intensive counseling to identify options; spending time getting to know the neighborhood / community; participating in workplace tours and informational interviews; and trying out real job activities will help job seekers to hone in on employment interests and goals. Employment staff may also have to provide some individuals with alternative ways of expressing their preferences such as the use of AAC devices or by pointing to pictures or symbols.
- **Job Carving/Job Creation** can be an effective approach. It often makes sense to take advantage of a person's unique set of skills and interests by carving out or creating a job within an existing business. In doing so, job developers need to demonstrate to the employer that the job seeker can make their business more efficient or productive. For more information about how to go about this process, see the ICI publication:
- ***When Existing Jobs Don't Fit: A Guide to Job Creation***
www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=126&type=topic&id=3

- **Person to Person-centered planning** is vital in the job placement process and helps job developers identify both the strengths and support needs that a person with ASD brings to the job search. Several ICI publications on this topic can be downloaded for free from the web
 - ***Starting with Me: A Guide to Person-Centered Planning for Job Seekers***
www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=54&type=topic&id=3
 - ***More Than Just a Job: Person-Centered Career Planning***
www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=16&type=topic&id=3

- **Networking** has been proven to speed up the job search! Building on the personal and professional business contacts of employment staff, the job seeker, family members, neighbors, and friends is a far more effective strategy for job development than making cold calls. This can often enhance that vital opportunity by providing a foot in the door to individuals with more significant barriers. For more information and tips about the how-tos of networking, see ICI publications:
 - ***Networking: A Consumer Guide to an Effective Job Search***
www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=62&type=topic&id=3
 - ***Making Networking Easier for Job Seekers: A Guide***
www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=138&type=topic&id=3

- *Teaching Networking Skills: Paving a Way to Jobs and Careers (manual)*
This manual provides a curriculum directly for use with job seekers. It can be downloaded for free at www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=251 or purchased through the ICI Publications Office
- Application Strategies and Accommodations
- Differences in communication and social interaction styles among individuals with ASD can make some of the up-front job search activities such as interviews and applications difficult. Some job seekers struggle with the big picture and may not understand what the employer is looking for or how much detail to provide.

- One common strategy is to practice interviews in advance. There are a number of other solutions to these issues involving accommodations to the application/interview process. These include:
 - Selective disclosure of the job seeker's disability by employment staff to prepare an employer, in order to obtain accommodations in an interview or when completing an application. For example, the job developer could explain to the employer that Tom, his job seeker, is a great worker, but has difficulty making eye contact and may not come across well in the interview. The employer may then be more willing to consider alternative ways of screening this candidate.
 - Obtaining interview questions in advance
 - Job seeker asking for assistance from employment staff or other "interpreter" when taking computer-based personality tests
 - Asking for alternatives to traditional interviews
 - Less formal (e.g., tours)
 - Use of portfolios
 - Job try-outs

- **Getting the Job Seeker Involved**
- Use creative and customized strategies to keep the job seeker involved and engaged in planning and job search activities. Incorporate AAC, photographs, story writing, or other expressive alternatives. Tasks that job seekers can contribute include:
- Designing and delivery of invitations for the career planning meeting
- Providing important information about job preferences, even if communication is limited. A person with a yes/no response might visit a variety of potential work sites and be asked whether (s)he likes each. Pictures can be taken so that the job seeker can be asked to point to his or her favorite. Job seekers who are non-verbal can also choose from two pictures to indicate job preferences (Lattimore, Parsons & Reid, 2002).
- Talking to friends and family about ideas for jobs
- Gathering business cards and job applications from places at which they are interested in working
- Compiling a list of things or photos they are proud of, to share with an employer at an interview

- **Situational Assessment as Job Try-out:**
- **A Central Strategy for Persons with Limited Communication**
- The reality for many people with ASD is that the typical hiring criteria are going to exclude them from getting the job. Why not offer the employer an opportunity to fully evaluate the individual's ability to do the job tasks by allowing him/her to try the job out for a few hours, a day, or even a couple of days, at no obligation to the employer? This also gives the individual the chance to understand the job and to make an informed decision about whether (s) he wants to work there. The job try-out should be portrayed as a reasonable accommodation of the normal hiring process, under the American with Disabilities Act (ADA), in order that the applicant gets equal consideration.

- The following are important guidelines for using situational assessment in this way:
 - **Establish clear parameters with all involved, including length of assessment and when the hiring decision will be made.
 - **Explain the idea of situational assessment to the job seeker and only use it if (s) he is absolutely comfortable with it.
 - **Involve co-workers and supervisors so that the fit between the job seeker and the work culture and available supports can be identified, and the employer has sufficient information to make a hiring decision.
 - **Explain clearly to the employer that the purpose is to determine potential for successful job performance over the long-term, rather than immediate mastery of the job by the end of the assessment

- Over the past few years, much attention and research has focused on persons with ASD. There are reasons to be optimistic that employment outcomes for this population can and will continue to improve:
- Expanding knowledge base about effective employment supports for workers with ASD
- Growing public understanding and sensitivity about individuals with autism
- Tremendous potential of assistive technology
- Growing recognition that autism is not a “vocational disorder”
- Individuals with ASD can work, but we need to match them with jobs that build on their strengths and interests. At the same time, we need to carefully consider the demands of particular jobs, the physical and social environments, and how we might provide instruction or accommodations that will make success possible. This requires precise support and planning, collaboration, creative strategizing, and, most importantly, an intimate understanding of the person with ASD as a unique individual. This takes time, perseverance, and commitment, but it works!

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