

Self-Determination Series

# Seeking Supported Employment: What You Need to Know

Determine Your Destiny

# Seeking Supported Employment: What You Need to Know

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# Introduction

Deciding whether you want to work is an important life decision. To make this decision, you'll need to know the answers to the next several questions. Read each question and write your answer in the space provided:

1. Is working what you want to do at this point in your life, given other things that are going on?
2. What kind of work would you like to do?
3. Where do you want to work?
4. How many hours a week do you want to work?
5. How much money would you like to make?

6. Do you already have the skills and qualifications you need for your desired job?
  
7. If you're not ready for your ideal job right now, do you want to work at another job while you get ready? If so, what kind of job would that be?
  
8. Would you like to do volunteer work instead of paid work?

The answers to these questions will help you decide which road to take to employment. All roads discussed in this booklet assume that you would like to get a job as soon as possible. Other options, such as going to school, getting job skills training, and volunteering also are good choices that you should discuss with family, friends, and service providers.

The different roads to finding employment are briefly described on the following pages. Read each description carefully, and think about whether it matches your needs and preferences. Then choose the option that best fits what you'd like to do right now.

# Different Roads to Work

## Which Road Should You Follow?

### ROAD#1: Doing it on your own

This road to employment involves competing with other people to get and keep a job. It's how most people get their jobs, including your family and service providers. It's called competitive employment and this means that you are working in a regular work setting, alongside coworkers who aren't mental health clients. You're also working for an hourly wage, usually at or above minimum wage.

Doing it on your own means that you conduct your own job search using newspaper or electronic Want Ads, asking people you know if there are openings where they work, or looking for Help Wanted signs at local businesses. You handle problems at your job on your own, or by discussing them with your friends, family, or service providers. Your boss judges how good of a job you are doing, and tells you what you are doing right and wrong. Both you and your boss decide how long you keep your job.

### ROAD#2: Supported employment

This road to employment also involves getting competitive employment (a job that is open to any applicant). But you don't do it entirely on your own.

Supported employment helps people with any type of disability look for, get, and keep a job. A service provider (often called an employment specialist) helps you decide what kind of job you want and then helps you find that job. If you need special training or support, that person provides it *after you get the job* (sometimes the employer does this instead). You work in places and positions that match your preferences and abilities.

Supported employment will help you every step of the way in deciding what you want to do, how to deal with any problems you encounter, and whether to tell your boss and coworkers about your mental health difficulties. You also receive help deciding how to coordinate working with receiving social security disability benefits. This is especially important if you decide you want to work, but you also want to continue to receive your benefits. With supported employment, the assistance you receive has no time limit. You can continue to receive help after you've been on the job for a while, or if you decide to look for a better job.

### ROAD#3: Transitional employment

On this road, you get the assistance of an employment specialist and you work in a real job setting for minimum wage or above. But the job you hold is temporary and does not belong to you. It is called a transitional placement, and it belongs to the service delivery agency that helps you. You work at this job for a period of time

(usually 6 months) and then move on to another transitional placement or perhaps to competitive employment. You usually have fewer choices about what kinds of work you do in transitional placements. This is because they are designed to give you experience, not to be your permanent job. If you want to choose the kind of work that you do in a job that you can keep as long as you want, transitional employment is not for you.

## ROAD #4: Sheltered employment

This is a very different road, and one you should choose with caution. On this road, you work in a setting called a sheltered workshop, where all of your coworkers have disabilities and you often make less than minimum wage. You do a small part of a larger job, called “piece work,” and you are paid according to how much work you finish, not according to an hourly wage.

Most sheltered workshops are run by social service agencies, and little or no assistance is offered to help you get a better job. On the other hand, you can receive a lot of help from staff inside the workshop whenever you have difficulty. Most people don’t make much money in a sheltered workshop, so their benefits are not affected. However, sheltered workshops are not the only way to work and keep your benefits. You can keep your SSI and SSDI checks on the supported employment road, too.

# Which Employment Road Do You Want to Take?



## Competitive ~

If you want to find a job on your own, you might start by looking in the newspaper or talking to friends and relatives about job openings where they work.

## Transitional ~

If you want transitional employment, you should ask your service provider to help you see whether there is a program that offers it in your local area.

## Sheltered ~

If you want to work in a sheltered workshop, you should discuss this with your service provider or other people you know who work in one.

## Supported ~

If you've chosen supported employment, contact your local department of vocational rehabilitation or department of mental health and ask them to recommend agencies that offer it. Some states call these employment services *Individual Placement and Support* (IPS), so ask about both. You can also find mental health programs at this link [www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov](http://www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov). Visit the program web sites you find, or call, to see if they provide supported employment or IPS. As you find and then visit programs, this booklet will help you judge the quality of the services they offer.

# How Do You Get Started?

1. Schedule an appointment with a staff member at an agency that offers supported employment. Let her or him know that this appointment is just to learn about the agency, not to join it.
2. Because you want to get all of your questions answered in an unhurried manner, ask if the appointment can last 30 minutes. If not, tell the person you'll need at least 20 minutes.
3. Don't forget to bring this booklet and a pen or pencil with you.
4. When you arrive, thank the staff member for taking the time to meet with you.
5. Near the beginning of the interview, let the staff member know that you have nineteen questions that you'd like to ask about their services. Explain that the questions are just to help you get clearer information about what kinds of help the agency offers. Emphasize that the questions are about the agency's supported employment program, not other types of employment services it offers.
6. Slowly read each question out loud and check off each answer.

7. If you feel uncomfortable reading the questions to the staff member, read them out loud to yourself and practice asking them to a friend or relative. You also can use the “Optional List of Questions to Give to Program Staff” at the end of this booklet. Remove this page, give it to the staff member, and have the person read and answer the questions while you mark the answers on your copy.
8. Be sure to ask your own questions as they occur to you. You may want to write down your own questions before the interview. There is space in this booklet for these questions.
9. It may be difficult to get all of your questions answered in one session. So at the end of the interview, thank the staff member and let her or him know that you may call back with additional questions. Be sure to put the person’s contact information in a safe place for future reference.
10. **Do not add up the answers until after you have left the interview.**

As you can see, using this booklet means that you will interview a staff member. If this makes you feel uncomfortable, it’s understandable. It might help to think about it in a new way. What you’re really doing is just talking, one person asking another person questions. Asking questions is a natural part of what happens during a visit. So relax, breathe, and take your time.

Check off each answer:

X

**Green  
Zone**

**Red  
Zone**

How many of your clients work in competitive jobs that anyone can apply for? At least 90% or less than 90%?	At least 90% <input type="checkbox"/>	Less than 90% <input type="checkbox"/>
How many of your clients work in settings where all workers have disabilities? Less than 20%, or 20% or more?	Less than 20% <input type="checkbox"/>	20% or more <input type="checkbox"/>
Can people who are working continue to receive support from program staff for as long as they want?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Do you help clients get jobs with no time limit, meaning not temporary?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
How many of your clients earn minimum wage or above? At least 90% or less than 90%?	At least 90% <input type="checkbox"/>	Less than 90% <input type="checkbox"/>

Add 1 point for each answer in the Green Zone and 0 for each answer in the Red Zone.

Score for first 5 questions only = \_\_\_\_\_

About how many clients earn \$15 an hour or more? At least 30% or less than 30%?	At least 30% <input type="checkbox"/>	Less than 30% <input type="checkbox"/>
How many of your clients get a job in the field they want? At least 80% or less than 80%?	At least 80% <input type="checkbox"/>	Less than 80% <input type="checkbox"/>
Does your program work with anyone interested in working, regardless of their abilities?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Does your program have in-person vocational support after 5pm?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

Check off each answer:



Green Zone	Red Zone
------------	----------

Does your program terminate clients from services, even though the clients still want to continue receiving services?	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>
What is the average amount of time people take to get a job in your agency? 6 months or less, or more than 6 months?	6 months or less <input type="checkbox"/>	More than 6 months <input type="checkbox"/>
Do staff at your agency provide individualized benefits counseling for people on SSI or SSDI?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Will your agency serve clients who want to work AND keep their SSI and SSDI benefits at the same time?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Does your program offer peer support services from people who have had mental health problems?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Does your program allow family or friends to be involved in the process of finding and keeping a job?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
How many of your clients also are clients of our state Vocational Rehabilitation agency? At least 50% or less than 50%?	At least 50% <input type="checkbox"/>	Less than 50% <input type="checkbox"/>
Does your program help clients keep their jobs if they go in the hospital or need to take time off for mental health reasons?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Will your staff talk to my case manager or psychiatrist if I ask them to?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
How many of your clients have a psychiatric disability? At least 25% or less than 25%?	At least 25% <input type="checkbox"/>	Less than 25% <input type="checkbox"/>

TOTAL SCORE for all 19 questions = \_\_\_\_\_

# What do the Red and Green Zones Mean?

The Green Zone and Red Zone have meanings similar to the stoplight you see at a street corner. An answer in the Green Zone is good. It means that this agency has services that benefit you according to research about “what works” for people with mental health challenges. The more answers you check off in the Green Zone, the better the program, and the more you’ll want to “GO” there for services. Answers in the Red Zone mean that the program does not offer services that would benefit you. You should “STOP” and considering looking further.

These Zones will help you see, even during the meeting, if this is a program you want to join or not. If during the interview you notice that most of the answers are falling in the Red Zone, you know that this program is missing some services that are important and good for you.

The first five questions ask about very important services that a supported employment program should offer. If all of the answers to these first five questions are in the Red Zone, then you know immediately that this program is missing some vital services.

**GREEN means GO**

**RED means STOP**

# How to Score Your Answers

Once you have left the meeting, find a quiet place to add up the program's score. To score this survey, all you need to be able to do is count to "19."

Start by adding up the scores for the first 5 questions. Count 1 point for each answer in the Green Zone and 0 points for each answer in the Red Zone. Write the total in the box beneath the first 5 questions.

Second, add up the scores for all 19 questions and write the total in the box under the last question.

To find out how the program rates, write these two numbers on the lines in the box below.

## ADD YOUR SCORES HERE

Score for first 5 questions = \_\_\_\_\_

If answers to ALL of the first 5 questions are in the Red Zone, your score will equal 0. This means that the program does not meet the official definition of supported employment and you should probably look for another program. There is no need to add up any further scores. If you checked an answer in the Green Zone for at least one of the 5 questions, add up the score for all 19 questions and write it on the line below.

Total score for all 19 questions = \_\_\_\_\_

**See the following page to interpret the TOTAL score.**

# How to Interpret the Total Score

16-19: This is an excellent program and you definitely should consider getting your supported employment services here.

11-15: This is a good program. If you think it matches your current needs and preferences, you should consider getting your supported employment services here.

6-10: This program is missing some of the services that make supported employment successful for people with mental health challenges. If staff will work with you to add some of the ingredients that are missing, you might want to consider getting your services here.

0-5: This program has none or very few of the basic ingredients of supported employment. It is missing many important features. If you have other choices, look elsewhere. If not, see whether staff will work with you to add some of the ingredients that are missing. If they cannot do this, you may be better off seeking employment on your own.

# What to Do Next?

If you found your supported employment program – congratulations! Although your journey has just begun, at least you know you are on the right road. Plus, you know that you will receive high quality services that research has shown are effective.

If you haven't found your supported employment program, don't be discouraged. Good programs are hard to find, but you should continue to search. After looking for a while, if you still cannot find a good program, decide if you want to settle for the best one you can find. Talk this over with people you trust and who you know well. Or, go back to the beginning of this booklet and consider other options, such as searching for a job on your own, volunteering, going to college, or enrolling in a vocational/technical school.

The important thing is to keep moving forward toward your goal of getting a job. Remember that most people who have had mental health difficulties can work and want to work. You are smart and creative enough to figure out a way to make that happen.

Optional: Write additional questions to ask below

1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Optional: List of Questions to Give to Program Staff

**(Tear out page and give to staff member.)**

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- How many of your clients work in competitive jobs that anyone can apply for?  
At least 90% or less than 90%?
- How many of your clients work in settings where all workers have disabilities?  
Less than 20% or 20% or more
- Can people who are working continue to receive support from program staff for as long as they want?
- Do you help clients get jobs with no time limit, meaning not temporary?
- How many of your clients earn minimum wage or above?  
At least 90% or less than 90%?
- About how many of your clients earn \$15 an hour or more? At least 30% or less than 30%?
- How many of your clients get a job in the field they want?  
At least 80% or less than 80%?
- Does your program work with anyone interested in working, regardless of their abilities?
- Does your program have in-person vocational support after 5pm?



# Continued

- Does your program terminate clients from services even though the clients still want to continue receiving services?
- What is the average amount of time people take to get a job in your agency?  
6 months or less or more than 6 months?
- Do staff at your agency provide individualized benefits counseling for people on SSI or SSDI?
- Will your agency serve clients who want to work AND keep their SSI or SSDI benefits at the same time?
- Does your program offer peer support services from people who have had mental health problems?
- Does your program allow family or friends to be involved in the process of finding and keeping a job?
- How many of your clients also are clients of our state Vocational Rehabilitation agency?  
At least 50% or less than 50%?
- Does your program help clients keep their jobs if they go in the hospital or need to take some time off for mental health reasons?
- Will your staff talk to my case manager or psychiatrist if I ask them to?
- How many of your clients have a psychiatric disability?  
At least 25% or less than 25%?

# Notes

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