

Vocational Services: Then & Now

Innovations in Employment Supports

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Disability Rights & Employment History Timeline

Timeline of Key Disability Rights, Inclusion, and Employment Milestones

Year	Milestone
1968	Architectural Barriers Act – First federal law requiring accessibility in federally funded buildings.
1972	Willowbrook Exposé – Public exposure of institutional conditions accelerated disability rights and deinstitutionalization efforts.
1972	First Center for Independent Living – Established in Berkeley, California, promoting self-determination and community inclusion.
1973	Rehabilitation Act – Section 504 became the first federal civil rights protection for people with disabilities.
1975	Education for All Handicapped Children Act – Guaranteed a free and appropriate public education; later became IDEA.
1977	Section 504 Sit-In – Disability activists successfully advocated for enforcement of Section 504 regulations.
1984	Developmental Disabilities Act – Promoted independence, productivity, and community integration.
1986	Supported Employment Recognized – Rehabilitation Act amendments recognized supported employment as a legitimate outcome.
1987	Willowbrook Closes – Symbolized a shift away from institutional care toward community living.
1990	Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) – Extended comprehensive civil rights protections to people with disabilities.
1992	Rehabilitation Act Amendments – Strengthened employment supports and workplace accommodation efforts.
1999	Olmstead v. L.C. – Affirmed the right to receive services in the most integrated setting appropriate.
2001	Ticket to Work Act – Expanded employment supports and work incentives for Social Security beneficiaries.
2008	ADA Amendments Act – Broadened the definition of disability and strengthened protections.

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2010	Rosa's Law – Replaced outdated terminology in federal law with 'intellectual disability.'
2013	OPWDD Transformation – Advanced person-centered planning, integrated services, and outcome-based supports.
2013	New York Employment First – Reinforced employment as the preferred outcome for working-aged people with disabilities.
2014	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) – Increased focus on competitive integrated employment and transition services.
2014	Employment First Commission – Promoted statewide strategies to increase employment opportunities.
2014	HCBS Settings Rule – Strengthened expectations for community integration and person-centered services.
2020s	Competitive Integrated Employment Expansion – Continued movement away from segregated services toward individualized employment opportunities.

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Category	Medical Model of Disability	Social Model of Disability
View of Disability	Disability is a problem or condition within the person.	Disability results from barriers in society, environments, and attitudes.
Primary Focus	Diagnosis, treatment, cure, or management of impairment.	Removing barriers and creating inclusive environments.
Source of the Problem	The individual's impairment or condition.	Physical, social, attitudinal, and systemic barriers.
Goal	Fix, treat, rehabilitate, or normalize the person.	Increase access, inclusion, participation, and belonging.
Role of Professionals	Experts determine needs and solutions.	Partners support, self-determination and informed choice.
Role of the Individual	Recipient of services and treatment.	Active decision-maker and expert in their own life.
Employment Perspective	Focus is on whether the person is "work ready."	Focuses on creating workplaces that are accessible and inclusive.
Responsibility for Change	The individual must adapt to the environment.	Society and systems must adapt to include everyone.
Example	A person uses a wheelchair and cannot access a building because of their mobility impairment.	A person uses a wheelchair and cannot access a building because there is no ramp or elevator.
Language Often Used	Deficit-focused, limitations, incapable, dependent.	Strength-based, accommodations, inclusion, accessibility.
Measure of Success	Reduced symptoms or improved functioning.	Full participation, choice, opportunity, and inclusion.
Outcome	Segregated or specialized services may be viewed as necessary.	Inclusive community participation is expected and valued.

COMMON EMPLOYMENT SERVICES TERMINOLOGY GUIDE

Term	Definition
Administrative Directive Memoranda (ADM)	OPWDD issues Administrative Directive Memoranda to assist regulated parties in complying with applicable statutes, rules, or other legal requirements.
Assessment	The systematic process of gathering information, measuring performance, and evaluating evidence to make a judgment or inform a decision.
Assistive Technology (AT)	Equipment, software, or devices that help individuals perform work tasks more independently.
Benefits Counseling	A resource for an individual to obtain benefits, understand the impact of work on their benefits, and/or to understand and use work incentives available through the Social Security Administration and other public or private programs.
Career Advancement	Opportunities for increased responsibility, skills, wages, or promotions.
Career Planning	Helping a person identify career goals and create a plan to achieve them.
Community-Based Prevocational Services (CBPV)	Services designed to build general work skills and prepare individuals for employment.
Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE)	A job in the community where a person earns at least minimum wage, works alongside people without disabilities, and has opportunities for advancement.
Customized Employment (CE)	A process that negotiates job duties and workplace conditions to match the strengths of a job seeker and the needs of an employer.
Discovery	A person-centered process used to learn about a person's interests, strengths, skills, support needs, and ideal work conditions.
Employment Goal	The specific type of work or career a person wants to pursue.
Employment Support Professional (ESP)	Staff who provide direct employment services and supports to job seekers and employees.
Employment Training Program (ETP)	An OPWDD service that provides internship opportunities to help individuals gain work experience and move toward employment.

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Term	Definition
Employment First	The belief that competitive integrated employment should be the first and preferred option for working-age individuals with disabilities.
Employer Engagement	Building and maintaining relationships with businesses to create employment opportunities.
Essential Functions	The fundamental duties of a job that must be performed by the employee.
Extended Services	The long-term support services required by a SEMP employee to maintain employment.
Fading	Gradually reducing support as a person becomes more independent.
Functional Limitation	The reduced, restricted, or complete inability to perform an everyday physical or mental action within a normal range. Rather than just naming the symptom, it describes exactly how that condition (e.g., pain, anxiety, or weakness) interferes with routine tasks, independent living, or working
Hard Skills	Technical or job-specific skills such as operating equipment, data entry, or food preparation.
Informed Choice	Ensuring a person has enough information to make their own decisions about employment and career goals.
Integrated Setting	An environment where people with and without disabilities interact regularly.
Job Analysis	A detailed examination of the tasks, skills, and requirements of a job.
Job Carving	Creating a position by combining selected tasks from existing jobs to match a person's strengths while meeting business needs.
Job Coaching	Training and support provided to help a person learn and maintain job duties.
Job Creation	Developing a new position within a company based on unmet business needs.
Job Development	Activities focused on identifying employment opportunities and building relationships with employers.
Job Development Plan	A person-centered roadmap that outlines how employment services will help a job seeker achieve their employment goal. It identifies the person's strengths, interests, skills, ideal work conditions, targeted employers, job

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Term	Definition
	search strategies, and the specific activities that will be completed to support successful job placement.
Job Match	The degree to which a person's skills, interests, and support needs align with a job opportunity.
Natural Supports	Assistance provided by supervisors, coworkers, or workplace systems rather than paid staff.
Pathway to Employment	An individualized OPWDD service designed to help people with developmental disabilities explore careers and prepare for jobs. Delivered over 12 months (up to 425 hours), it focuses on vocational "discovery," developing a personalized career plan, and trying community internships
Person-Centered Planning	Planning that focuses on what is important to the individual rather than what services are available.
Prompting	Providing cues or assistance to help someone complete a task.
Reasonable Accommodation	A modification that enables a qualified individual with a disability to perform essential job functions.
Retention	Maintaining employment over time.
Self-Determination	A person's ability to make choices and direct their own life and employment goals.
Social Security Disability Income (SSDI)	Provides benefits to disabled or blind individuals who are "insured" by workers' contributions to the Social Security trust fund. These contributions are the Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) social security tax paid on their earnings or those of their spouses or parents. Title II of the Social Security Act authorizes SSDI benefits.
SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME (SSI)	Makes cash assistance payments to aged, blind and disabled people (including children under age 18) who have limited income and resources. The Federal government funds SSI from general tax revenues. Some States, like New York State, pay benefits to some individuals to supplement their federal benefits. In New York State, the Social Security Administration combines the state supplementary payment with the Federal payment into one monthly check.

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Term	Definition
Soft Skills	Workplace behaviors and interpersonal skills such as communication, teamwork, punctuality, and professionalism.
Supported Employment (SEMP)	Ongoing supports that help individuals obtain and maintain employment in the community.
Systematic Instruction	A structured teaching approach that uses consistent methods to teach job skills.
Task Analysis	Breaking a job task into smaller steps to teach or evaluate performance.
Transferable Skills	Skills learned in one setting that can be used in another setting (e.g., customer service, organization, communication).
Vocational Assessment	Activities used to identify a person's skills, interests, preferences, and support needs related to employment.
Vocational Development Plan (VDP)	A structured plan identifying employment goals, activities, and progress toward employment outcomes.
Vocational Profile	A summary of a person's employment-related strengths, interests, and support needs.
Work Incentives	Programs that help people receiving public benefits work while protecting benefits eligibility.
Workplace Culture	The values, expectations, and behaviors that characterize a workplace.
Workplace Assessment	An evaluation of a work environment to determine its suitability, accessibility, and support needs for a job seeker.
Business Needs Assessment	Gathering information about an employer's workforce needs, challenges, and opportunities.
Informational Interview	A meeting with an employer or worker to learn about a job, industry, or workplace.
Vocational Assessment	An ongoing process involving the systematic collection of information about a student's vocational aptitudes, abilities, expressed interests and occupational awareness.

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Common Acronyms for New Employment Specialist	
ABS	Adaptive Behavior Scale
ACCES-VR	Adult Career and Continuing Education Services– Vocational Rehabilitation
ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
ADM	Administrative Directive Memoranda
ADHD	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
APSE	Association of People Supporting Employment First (apse.org)
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
ASL	American Sign Language
CBA	Community-based assessment
CBI	Community-based Instruction
CBPV	Community-based Prevocational
CC	Care Coordination
CDOS	Career Development and Occupational Skills
CM	Care Manager
CP	Cerebral Palsy
CRP	Community Rehabilitation Program
CWBA	Community Work Based Assessment
CVE	Community Vocational Experience
DDRO	Developmental Disabilities Regional Office (local office of OPWDD)
DH WOW	Day Hab Without Walls
DOH	Department of Health
DOL	Department of Labor
DSS	Department of Social Services
DVE	Diagnostic Vocational Evaluation

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ETP	Employment Training Program
FLSA	Fair labor Standards Act
HCBS Waiver	Home and Community Based Services Waiver
HIPAA	Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act
IDD	Intellectual Developmental Disability
IRWE	Impairment Related Work Expense
JAN	Job Accommodation Network(askjan.org)
JDP	Job Development Plan
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individualized Education Program (School based)
ILC	Independent Living Center
IPE	Individualized Plan for Employment (ACCES-VR)
IPOP / POPO	Individual Plan of Protective Oversight
IRA	Individualized Residential Alternative
LCED	Level of Care Determination
LP	Life Plan
MH	Mental Health
MOU	Memoranda of Understanding
NYSED	New York State Education Department
OASAS	Office of Addiction Services and Supports
OJT	On the Job Training
OMH	Office of Mental Health
OPWDD	Office of People with Developmental Disabilities
PASS Plan	Plan for Achieving Self Sufficiency
PCP	Person Centered Planning
RSA	Rehabilitation Services Administration
SACC	Skills and Achievement Credential Commencement

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SGA	Substantial Gainful Activity
SAP	Staff action plan
SEMP	OPWDD Supported Employment
SNA	Safety Net Assistance
SSA	Social Security Administration
SSDI	Social Security Disability Insurance
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
TBI	Traumatic Brain Injury
TWP	Trial Work Period
VDP	Vocational Development Plan
VR	Vocational Rehabilitation
WBL	Work based learning
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
WIP	Work Incentives Planning

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Vocational Services in New York State: OPWDD vs. ACCES-VR

Category	OPWDD	ACCES-VR
Primary Purpose	Supports individuals with developmental disabilities to obtain, maintain, and advance in employment and meaningful community participation.	Prepares individuals with disabilities for employment and assists them in obtaining, maintaining, and advancing in competitive integrated employment.
Who is Eligible?	Individuals with a documented developmental disability who are eligible for OPWDD services and have established Medicaid eligibility, enrollment, and HCBS Waiver.	Individuals with a physical, mental, emotional, sensory, or learning disability that creates a barrier to employment and who can benefit from vocational rehabilitation services.
Funding Source	Primarily funded through New York State Medicaid (Federal and State Medicaid dollars) and NYS appropriations.	Primarily funded through Federal Rehabilitation Act funds and New York State Education Department funding.
Employment Focus	Long-term employment supports and provides ongoing services.	Time-limited vocational rehabilitation leading to employment.
Typical Services	Discovery, Pathway to Employment, Community-Based Prevocational Services, Supported Employment, Job Coaching, Employment Training Program, Vocational Development Plans.	Career counseling, assessments, training, college/trade school supports, assistive technology, job development, placement services, and short-term job coaching.
Service Duration	May provide long-term supports throughout a person's employment journey.	Generally short-term; services end when employment goals are achieved and stability is reached.
Provider Billing Method	Providers bill through eMedNY Medicaid claims using authorized service codes and approved service plans.	Providers bill through contract-based milestone payments or fee schedules tied to service completion and employment outcomes.
Plan Required	Person-Centered Service Plan (Life Plan) and authorizations.	Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).
Primary Goal	Sustain meaningful employment and community inclusion over time.	Achieve competitive integrated employment and career advancement.

Key Takeaways:

- OPWDD = Long-term supports funded by Medicaid
- ACCES-VR = Time-limited vocational rehabilitation funded through federal and state education dollars
- Many individuals utilize both systems during their employment journey