

Supported Employment (SE) is a program established by the federal government in the 1980's that enables individuals with severe disabilities to become employed. It is a complex system that blends resources from a variety of sources for job exploration, development and coaching support. Job coaching and support may be provided on an individual or group basis. The following information provides a general description of SE.

What Is Supported Employment?

It is a model of employment that provides people with severe disabilities the appropriate, ongoing support that is necessary for success in a competitive work environment. Most individuals in a SE program receive services from a Community Based Service Provider (CBSP). Generally CBSPs provide vocational assessment, locate or develop jobs, and provide job skills training. Most CBSPs have job coaches who work at the job site and help the client learn job tasks, identify job modifications including assistive technology, and work with the employer to solve behavioral or social problems.

Who Is Supported Employment Designed to Help?

It is for individuals with severe disabilities who need lifelong, ongoing support.

Where Is Supported Employment Located?

SE is never in a segregated setting with all co-workers being disabled. The federal government has defined what employment settings meet their definition of SE. Examples of employment settings for SE would be:

1. In a competitive job with no other individuals with disabilities.
2. Part of an enclave of no more than six individuals with disabilities.
3. Part of a mobile crew of no more than six individuals with disabilities who travel to different locations to provide a service such as cleaning or landscaping.

4. Self-employed business. An example would be a client who has set up a company that shreds documents for various businesses.

When Is Supported Employment Appropriate?

SE can begin as part of a vocational rehabilitation program once an individual has left the public school system. Vocational Rehabilitation has a responsibility to provide SE services when appropriate. School systems play a role as they are mandated to formally plan for the transition from school into adult services. Schools should also take an active role in providing career education, skills training, and job sampling as part of their services.

How Does Supported Employment Happen?

SE begins with the assembling of a team of individuals who will explore options and create a plan for supported employment. The planning team should include the individual who is disabled, their family, school personnel, adult service providers, and members of the community who may be able to provide information and assistance. Vocational Rehabilitation can begin the SE plan and will fund services for a designated length of time, usually one year. SE requires that services be provided without disruption and the plan must designate the source of extended support service funds. State agencies that typically provide such funding are Developmental Disability, Mental Retardation, Mental Health, or similar agencies. When state agencies are not available to fund SE extended services solutions have been found by creative use of other programs such as Supplemental Security Income.

During the planning process a Community Based Service Provider must be located to provide the actual SE services. Typically the CBSP begins by providing intensive services in vocational assessment, job location, and job placement but might also include job skill training, assistive technology, necessary job modifications, and on-going support. Once a person has been placed on a job his/her need for ongoing support may diminish over

time. The goal is for the employer to eventually provide the "natural" supports available from co-workers.

Why Is There Supported Employment?

SE is the end point of the movement to retain individuals with severe disabilities within the communities in which they live. Previously these same people might have spent their lives in segregated settings such as institutions. SE is a means by which people can be successful in employment that fits their talents, interests, and abilities.