

D-2 Assisted Employment: Add Diversity to your Work Place and Learn Along the Way

About five years ago, the University of Georgia Law Library added a part time employee to its staff to normalize our mail delivery and to help complete the programming of RFID tags for items in the collection. The individual who filled this position has significant intellectual and emotional disability. The job itself was designed with the help of job coaches, who spoke with folks in various departments in the library and identified specific existing tasks that could be assigned to this individual. In collaboration with the job coaches, we then 'carved' a job description for the position by coupling what we previously considered unrelated tasks into work for a 16 hour a week job. A job coach helped transition this worker into the daily routine, and five years later, a coach still checks in periodically and offers additional support, training, and consultation.

The work this employee performs is vital to the library. We've made progress on our tag programming project that normal operations would not have accommodated. The morning and afternoon mail runs are completed reliably and timely—something that (for some reason) had never been the case before.

By all accounts, the life of this worker has changed significantly for the better with the addition of regular real world employment. The money helps, but the sense of self sufficiency and having something to offer is probably the primary cause. And, everyone working in the library has learned – about work, about human ability, about their own disabilities, and about diversity.

What is disability?

- Physical, mental, or emotional impairment which limits one or more major life functions
- Individuals with disabilities make up the largest single minority group in the US

Why is employment so important for individuals with disabilities?

- Fundamental part of adult life
- Offers a sense of purpose
- Shapes who we are, and how we fit into our community
- Contributes to economic self sufficiency
- Right mostly denied to individuals with disabilities
 - March 2011 DOL statistics show that the percentage of people with disabilities in the labor force was 21.0. By comparison, the percentage of persons with no disability in the labor force was 69.7

What is assisted employment (often called supported employment)?

- Real work in an integrated setting (real world)
- Individuals with severe disabilities (psychiatric, mental retardation, learning disabilities, traumatic brain injury)
- Job coaches

- Job carving
- Transportation assistance
- Assistive technology
- Specialized job training (job coach)
- Individually tailored supervision (job coach)

What do job coaches do?

- Assess interests and potential skills of the individual
- Analyze jobs or work places to find suitable placement or to “carve” suitable job
- Identify possible accommodations
- Offer one to one training on the job site
- Provide job retention services
- At every step, supports both the individual with a disability and the employer

Who pays for job coach services?

- Vocational Rehabilitation Agency
- Mental Health and Mental Retardation Programs
- Medicaid waivers
- Social Security Work Incentives
- Many foundations, local nonprofits

What benefits accrue to the workplace?

- Job coaches can identify and pre-screen candidates
- Both initial and continuing training and support for both employee and employer
- Diversifies the workplace