



Empowered by Employment

Breaking Down Barriers- Brain Injury Alliance Conference

November 2022

Colorado Office of Employment First



COLORADO OFFICE OF
EMPLOYMENT FIRST

— Work Elevated —

Colorado Office of Employment First (COEF)

Our Vision:

A culture of inclusive, meaningful, and competitive employment for all people.

Our Mission:

Leading Colorado toward equitable employment for all people with disabilities through collaboration, systems innovation, and training excellence.



Collaboration

Promoting work as part of a financially secure, healthy, and fulfilled life.



Systems Innovation

Convening to improve policies, remove barriers, bust myths, and promote technology.



Training Excellence

Elevating evidence-based strategies through training and learning communities.



Session Topics

- 1 **Employment First as a Philosophy & Practice**
- 2 **Social Determinants of Health & Social Roles**
- 3 **Self-Determination, Informed Choice, & Supported Decision Making**
- 4 **A Story of Empowerment through Employment**



Employment First



What is Employment First?

- A belief & value that all individuals regardless of level of disability are capable of full inclusion and working in their communities
 - Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE)
- It is the first and preferred outcome, regardless of level of disability, for employment in businesses found in the community, with regular compensation, equal advancement and equal interaction with non-disabled co-workers
 - Real Work for Real Pay!
- Involves Systems Change & Culture Shift efforts in both State and Community agencies related to employment policies, service delivery, and funding toward Employment outcomes for people with disabilities



Why is Employment First Important?

National Core Indicators:

- Nearly 85% of individuals with significant disabilities are unemployed or underemployed.

IPS Employment Center:

- 65% of individuals with significant mental illness want to work, only 2% have access to an evidenced based Supported Employment Program

Disability Type	Participation Rate (%)
Cognitive Disability	15%
Mental Disability	25%
Any Disability	34%
No Disability	80%



American Community Survey (2018)



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Social Determinants of Health



Employment as a Social Determinant of Health

- Unemployment can have negative health consequences
 - Those who are unemployed report feelings of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and demoralization
 - Unemployed individuals tend to suffer more from stress-related illnesses such as high blood pressure, stroke, heart attack, heart disease, and arthritis
- Job benefits such as health insurance, paid sick leave, and parental leave can affect the health of employed individuals
 - Periods of economic recession are possibly associated with higher prevalence of mental health and substance use disorders, and other physical health concerns
 - Employment is a protective factor (SAMHSA, 2020)



Empowering

Person-Centeredness,
Social Roles, & Integration



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Person-Centeredness

- Taking the needed time to learn about and understand the whole person
- Finding and understanding what is important to someone and balancing it with what is also important for them in their life
- Helping and supporting people get better lives...not just better paper
- Guided by values and practice principles that acknowledge people (not service providers) are the experts regarding their lives and needs
- A practitioner thinks about the the individuals needs versus the needs of the system (Jones, nd)



Social Role Valorization

- Originating in Scandinavia in the 1960s, normalization meant “making available to all people with disabilities the patterns of life and conditions of everyday living which are as close as possible to the regular circumstances and ways of life or society.” (www.socialrolevalorization.com)
- Wolf Wolfensberger, the founder of normalization, replaced the word ‘Normalization’ with Social Role Valorization to better describe the importance of social roles in society
 - The more valued someone is for their role, the more likely they are to experience a “good life”
- According to an article by John Armonstrong, there are two major ways of achieving this: 1) to enhance the competencies of people, and 2) to enhance the social image of people



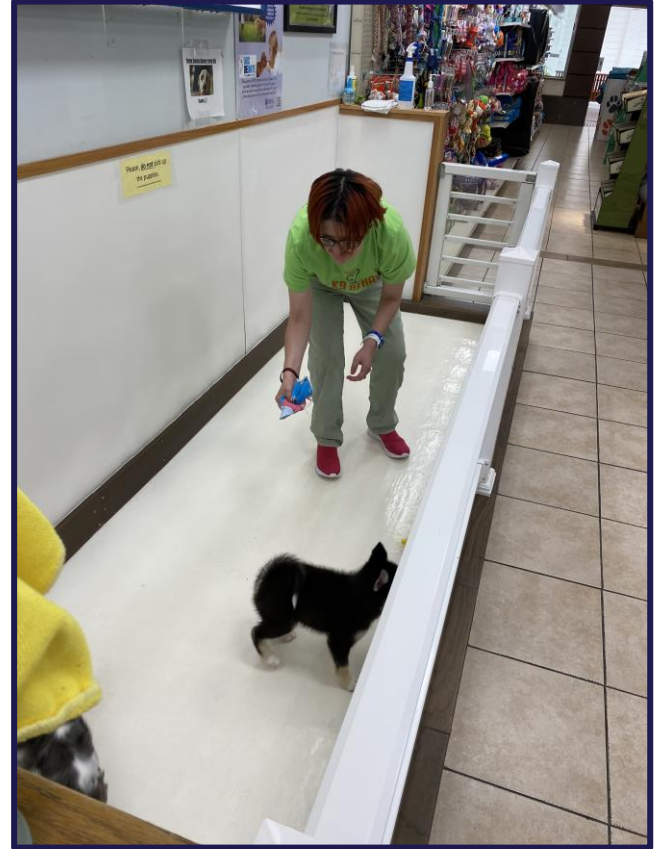
Integration

- People with disabilities are visible in the workplace to the public, which allows society to see the value and capabilities of all individuals
 - Enhancing awareness, knowledge, and the social image of people (Social Role Valorization Theory)
- When integrated in a workplace, people with disabilities can experience authentic interpersonal interactions with co-workers, customers, & supervisors
- Full Inclusion!



Empowerment

**Self-Determination, Informed
Choice, & Supported Decision
Making**



Self-Determination

- Self-Determination: the ability to know and believe in oneself toward achieving something that is wanted
- Self-determination contributes to positive results in areas such as employment, education, community living, and improved quality of life (Wehmyer et al., 2003)
- Self-determination is important and drives the employment journey for an individual
- Focuses on the individual making their decisions and paving the direction of their employment journey



Informed Choice



- Informed Choice is an important concept of employment and supporting individuals with disabilities across all areas of their lives
- Informed Choice is the individuals choice based on being provided with all information necessary to make their decision
 - This could be information from family members, professionals, and other members of the individuals support team
- Ensuring the individual has all pertinent information to make an informed decision and supporting that decision is key!



Supported Decision Making

- Supported Decision Making is natural process that people use when making important decisions
- Supported Decision Making is a set of strategies that can help individuals with disabilities have more control over their lives and and future
 - It involves family, friends, and other support team members working together with individuals in making complex decisions
- Supported Decision Making empowers people with disabilities to ask for support where and when they need it from family members, friends, and professionals



Supported Decision Making: The Support

- Similar to people without disabilities, sometimes people with disabilities need support in making decisions
 - May need someone to explain their options
 - May need someone to explain the outcomes when they make a choice
 - May need support with understanding information provided by doctors, lawyers, providers, employers, and other support staff
 - May need support with communicating what they want and need





Meet Nick York

**Investment Specialist &
Realtor**



Nick's Story: Survivor & Employment

- Sustained a TBI in 2007
- Spent 4 months in the hospital
- Decided to go back to school
- Introduced to CrossFit by chance
- Figured out how to study in order to do well in school
- Found a job that allowed me to earn a living and still gave me the freedom to do extra curricular activities at my leisure



Employment Services



How to Access Employment Services

- Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)
- Medicaid Home & Community Based Services Waivers
 - Supported Living Services Waiver (SLS)
 - Developmental Disabilities Waiver (DD)

- Contact/Connect with:
 - Your Brain Injury resource navigator or advisor about your interest in employment
 - The Colorado Office of Employment First (COEF)
 - Local DVR Office/Counselor
 - Medicaid Waiver Case Manager



Today's Takeaways:



Hope you take away that:



- ❑ Everyone can work regardless of disability, impact of disability, and experiences
- ❑ Self-Empowerment is an essential component within all areas of life including employment
- ❑ Strategies for implementing and supporting Self-Empowerment for People with Brain Injuries
- ❑ Employment is essential to recovery, community integration, and enhancing an individuals overall Quality of Life





Discussion & Questions



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Thank you!

