

## **Employment First: Employment Question of the Month**

**To: Employment First stakeholders**

**From: Statewide Employment First Coordinator Mike Maley**

**Re: Employment Question of the Month: Paths to Employment**

(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

Every month, we will publish answers to an **Employment Question of the Month**. These provide good discussion topics and help provide guidance on the work going forward as we implement the Governor's Executive Order 13-04 and the Employment First Integrated Work Plan. To submit a Question of the Month, email [employment.first@state.or.us](mailto:employment.first@state.or.us).

**Question: "Is there a single path to employment?"**

**Answer:** There is not just one path to employment. In its most basic form, the term "pathways to employment" is defined as a person-centered approach that delivers the services and supports necessary to help an individual with intellectual and developmental disabilities obtain and maintain community integrated employment.

While there is a broadly defined common definition, this path is unique for each person. However, there are four common paths outlined at the onset of the Employment First initiative that are still meaningful to working-age adults.

The first path is people who are clear on their desire for community integrated employment and want to begin that pursuit as quickly as possible.

A second path is someone who wants to pursue integrated employment, but needs more information about possibilities and options before pursuing a job. This is where the use of the "discovery" process might be helpful. Some people may also want to pursue post-secondary education goals instead of immediately going to work.

A third path involves people who are unsure of whether they want to pursue integrated employment and want to learn more or work on some general skills before pursuing integrated employment. This group may include people with challenging issues for whom pursuit of employment may require additional information or learning.

Finally, there are some people, for various reasons, who are clearly unwilling to pursue integrated employment at this time or within the next two years.

Regardless of which path someone is on, the system will provide the planned supports and services in a context that is helpful, encouraging, and individualized. The agencies involved in providing the employment services should work to ensure the individual receives the supports needed to move along and be successful in his or her path.

To accomplish this, an array of strategies and approaches may be used so each person can make fully-informed choices. For example, for someone who desires integrated employment but wants more information about working in the community, the strategy may be to expand that person's opportunities and experiences in community work, volunteer, and other settings. If someone says they do not want to pursue integrated employment at this time, there still will be a need for ongoing dialog with the individual. Case managers and personal agents are expected to continue the discussion about employment possibilities, service options, benefits of employment, and address fears or concerns that an individual or his or her family may have.

I want to make two final points about pathways to employment. The first is that the beginning steps should start early in a person's life, before reaching adulthood or even high school transition age. Second, the path to employment doesn't stop once someone obtains an integrated job in the community. Once hired, efforts on improving employment status or career advancement should become the new focus.

Thank you all for your continued involvement, support, and advocacy for services to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Oregon. If you have comments or other questions, please email them to [employment.first@state.or.us](mailto:employment.first@state.or.us).

~ Mike