



Seeking Quality Supported Employment Services

Finding an Employment Provider can be stressful. Some parts of the state have many options to choose from, and some have only a few (if that many). The OVR Counselor will encourage you to select a provider. The following are suggested questions a job seeker, family member, or other helper can ask when interviewing supported employment providers. Asking questions helps you learn about the ways they provide services. Under each question, you will find possible things to listen for, so you understand best practice and can determine which agency may be the best fit for you. Remember, supported employment should be individualized for each job seeker. Not everyone wants the same kind of job, so all cases are different.

Question: How do you know what kind of job to look for or what I'd be good at doing?

You'll want to listen for a response along the lines of 1) "We'll devote time to get to know you, learn about things you do well, like to do, beginning with familiar things in your life and then building toward new experiences. All this time, we'll be thinking about fitting job conditions – the nature of work tasks, characteristics for co-workers, kinds of workplaces that work well, and what kinds of things will be needed for you to be successful..." 2) "This process takes different periods of time for different people – usually 6 weeks to 3 months. The idea is that we have time to establish a positive working relationship and learn personal aspects about interests and skills that will lead to a fitting and personally fulfilling job." 3) "After we've gathered enough information about the nature of a good job, we will translate what's been learned into employment possibilities. This includes networking with people we know, and we may ask about your connections as well. We'll match job characteristics with job tasks; and then match the tasks with types of employers and finally with specific employers and contact people --- mapping a job search plan to find fitting employment." Caution: You may want to be leery of anyone who tells you they have a large list of employers where they can quickly place you.

Question: My daughter has never been able to find a job where she can do all of the responsibilities. What will you do if my daughter can't do what is in a job description? Frankly, I can't envision my daughter getting a job.

You'll want to listen for a response along the lines of "If you can't envision employment, then we need to work together – devoting time to learn more about your daughter's interests and talents, and things she has to offer within employment. Then we join with others to translate what's been learned into employment possibilities – seeking employers who have needs that meet the specific skills that she can contribute. Then, working in partnership with her and employers, we'll seek to negotiate work that matches her skills, talents and interests with their needs – without regard for their predetermined job descriptions." Caution: You may want to be leery of anyone who quickly responds with "well, some people just aren't employable or couldn't ever keep up."

Question: What kinds of support do you provide once on the job?

You'll want to listen for a response along the lines of "We take time to learn how you can learn best. Then, when we're exploring possible employers, we learn their typical ways of training and supporting new employees. (e.g., How does a new employee learn this task? Who teaches them? How long does it take?) When hired, we use this information to plan, with you and the employer, a way to use these typical methods to the fullest extent possible, with our employment specialist providing additional support or instruction if and as needed." This level of support will change over time. It is the Employment Specialist's job to help you learn tasks and routines and become stable on the job; it is not their job to be with you every minute of every shift.

Question: How often should I receive follow-up services after I have a job? How does your agency pay for long-term support?

Supported employment is provided through the term of employment. Extended Services (aka Long-term support) are essential ingredients of supported employment. They include regular (typically no less than two times a month) follow-up visits with the supported employee and supervisors. The number of visits may change over time, but remember you can always ask for help! It is important to communicate with your Employment Specialist about what you need. Varied resources are used to pay for long-term supports and follow-up after people have been successfully "closed" by OVR. Basically, OVR pays for the first part of services, and then the supported employment vendor provides long-term supports using Medicaid waiver funds, or other funds they

or the supported employee may be able to access. If you have a Medicaid waiver, be sure your Case Manager knows you are interested in going to work and finding a supported employment provider.

Question: What have you learned about this work? What kind of changes have you made?

Here, it is important to hear that people have a commitment to learning and developing their approaches over time, based on experiences, personal insights, professional development opportunities, and outside consultations. Employment Specialists continue to learn new skills, like all professionals.

Question: How many people does each Employment Specialist serve at a time, and how often will I meet with this person?

This response will vary, and there is no set limit or magic number. You want to hear that each Employment Specialist works with a manageable number of people and has time in their schedule to meet with you regularly. This will likely be once a week at first, as they get to know you and figure out what good work will look like. While you are actively looking for a job, you should be in touch regularly to hear about new ideas. The key is that regular communication is important, and you are welcome to reach out with questions.

Question: Can you give me an example of someone you've been serving since you started? What do their services look like? What kinds of jobs have they had? How has their job/supports changed over time for this person?

The story you're told about this person should include examples of service flexibility, ways setbacks were handled, expectations for the person's growth/development, job advancements, and things learned over time. If it doesn't, ask!

Question: What experience do you have working with someone having a similar impact of disability?

Even though everyone is unique in more ways than can be described, and the impact of the same disability (e.g., brain injury) will be very different for each person, it's still important to hear that the organization has personnel who've devoted the time to learn and understand the social and functional impact of your disability (e.g., brain injury, autism, intellectual disability, mental illness.) If they have no background regarding the impact of your disability, then it's important to know they're committed

to learning.

Question: What are the educational and experience background levels of employment specialists? How do they learn about their responsibilities in supported employment?

In Kentucky, there are people who have a wide range of educational experiences, from high school diplomas through master's degrees, who are excellent employment specialists. Most important in the response to this question is the recruiting, selection, and training of employment specialists having high expectations, a vision for good jobs for the people represented, and a commitment to learning about their work over time.

Questions?

If you have concerns around the level of support received, or not being received, you can contact the following people:

1. The employment specialist and/or their supervisor
2. The OVR Counselor
3. OVR CRP Branch Manager Ronniel.Ohair@ky.gov
4. If billing a Medicaid waiver DDID.SupportedEmployment@ky.gov
5. Katie Wolf Whaley, the Supported Employment Training Program Director - kwolf@uky.edu

If you have additional questions about seeking or receiving services, please contact the SE Training Project Director, Katie Wolf Whaley, at kwolf@uky.edu or 859-218-5960. This information is shared courtesy of the Kentucky Supported Employment Training Project.