

Alberta Association for Supported Employment (aase) Best Practices

Finding a Definition or Methodology for Best Practices

In the supported employment (SE) community, we frequently refer to “Best Practices.” Many of us generally accept or assume that this designation refers to those practices which are the most ethically sound, progressive and inclusive with regard to employment supports for persons with disabilities. Many organizations throughout North America refer to best practices within their organization’s mandates and it is not uncommon to find statements such as “This organization supports best practices in the supported employment field,” posted on web sites or within mission statements.

Only one organization we located—The University of New Mexico—actually posts an *extensive* document detailing best practices in supported employment. Some organizations, however, do post on their web sites certain activities and procedures they support under the heading of best practices. But, in general, there is no *formal* consensus on what those practices are.

TASH, a well known organization which defines itself as “an international advocacy association of people with disabilities, their family members, other advocates and people who work in the disability field,” states that they “endorse certain features of employment for all people with disabilities.” These features, listed below, were originally drafted in 1998 and revised in 2000.

- Integration
- Income and benefits
- Choice
- Control of resources
- Ongoing career advancement
- Individualized and natural supports
- Equal access

APSE (The Association for Persons in Supported Employment) the primary national association for Supported Employment in the United States, posts no information regarding best practices on its web site.

AFSE (The Association For Supported Employment) is the primary United Kingdom association in the field of SE, and creates a foundation for its values around

- Individual focus
- Long-term commitment (of services providers / funders)
- Full participation
- Variety and flexibility (in both employment and employment supports)
- Social inclusion
- Real jobs

WASE (the World Association for Supported Employment) lists seven “criterion” headings to evaluate service provision on their web site. The primary headings, which also contain brief sub-sections, are as follows

- All supported employment service providers (SPs) must be customer focused.
- The supported employment process is an individual process.
- The organization must provide individual support plans based on individual input.
- The SE activities must lead to a paid job.
- The organization must provide and/or organize ongoing support which is not time-limited, but is focused on individual needs and the needs of the employer.
- The organization must have an internal program evaluation system.
- The organization must demonstrate outcomes.

Best Practices in Supported Employment: Current Available Publications and their Authors

There are several texts available which describe practices that the author(s) perceive(s) to be best practices in supported employment.

Facing The Future – Best Practices in Supported Employment (DiLeo and Langton, eds. 1996) is a collection of 32 articles written by various leaders in the field.

Career Recovery: Best Practices in the Vocational Rehabilitation of Persons with Serious Mental Illness (Shafer 1998) outlines best practices for a specific disability group.

Working Together: Workplace Culture, Supported Employment & Persons With Disabilities (DiLeo and Hagner 1992) is a supported employment “how to, and why” text, which outlines many best practices, but does not separate best practices out into a singular chapter topic or discussion.

Countless other supported employment texts describe, briefly, the authors’ views on best practices, e.g., those written by Denise Bissonnette around job marketing and workplace inclusion.

A Living Document: AASE's Vision for Best Practices in Supported Employment

Since we are unable to find examples of texts and documents which *specifically* address best practice in the field of supported employment as a separate, unique topic, we intend for this document to collect, in one place, those practices which best reflect the values and beliefs of our association, our members and the population we serve.

This document is a "living document" and should be reviewed and updated, as necessary, on an annual basis.

It is our hope that, although our current member services may not accurately reflect every best practice outlined herein, that we may begin (or continue) working toward the highest possible standard of service provision for the benefit of our field and those individuals who employ us to achieve employment and inclusion.

Key Concepts for Best Practices

- Guiding principles which direct best practices.
- Service design and provision (client-directed, individualized, sustainable, etc).
- Intake and assessment (pre-employment and relationship-based vs. assessments, etc.).
- Career exploration and career development.
- Marketing and job placement.
- Job coaching and follow-up services.
- Service evaluation.
- Promoting supported employment and educating families, businesses and communities.

Guiding Principles for Best Practices in Supported Employment

Since this document is a living document in an early stage of development, there are several specific service issues and best practices we have not yet outlined.

In order to guide this association, its members and other service providers toward developing and implementing best practices around supported employment service provision, we will refer to the following guiding principles:

- Design all processes, strategies and philosophies to promote greater work-force inclusion, personal choice and independence for persons with disabilities.
- Do not allow processes, strategies or philosophies to interfere with building personal capacity or reducing poverty for persons with disabilities.
- Ensure that any interventions used are those that are the least intrusive, most respectful and most effective strategies available.
- Strive to maintain or improve your service standards.

1 - Service Design

A Services are client directed, individualized, and sustainable.

Persons with disabilities have the right to determine the type of service which is suitable for them.

Service providers demonstrate the strategies and mechanisms which ensure that persons in service are providing meaningful input into their support plan.

- Service is tailored to fit the individual's capacities and needs rather than individuals having to "fit" into inflexible service models.
- Employment Services (and Self-Employment Services) must be sustainable so that persons with disabilities have ongoing access to supports as required.

B Design services / programs to reflect the organization and its clientele.

- There is no "one-size-fits-all" model when designing services and programs. Two crucial elements, which service providers must account for are, the client and his or her specific needs.
- Ensure that the client has input into his or her program/service design, and that your service provision builds on that client's existing capacities and resources to help them gain and retain valued employment.
- Make your organization's client base, values and guiding principles visible within your service-design process. We are accountable to our clients, ourselves and our funders. How will you achieve accountability within your new service?

C For new services, try to contribute something unique to the community being served rather than simply duplicating existing services.

- Focus new services and programs on new and innovative options and opportunities. In early development, ask the following questions: What gaps will the service fill? What needs will the service meet (which are currently inadequately addressed)?

D Design employment services to facilitate career development, not just job placements, for persons with disabilities.

- AASE views career development as a best practice in SE service provision. Therefore,.. support individuals to find work that holds the most meaning, satisfaction and opportunity for them based on their dreams, abilities and unique "gifts."

2 - Service Provision

A Services are client directed, individualized, and sustainable.

- Persons with disabilities have the right to determine the type of service that is suitable for them.
- Service providers are able to demonstrate strategies and mechanisms which ensure that persons in service are providing meaningful input into their support plans. (e.g. person centered planning sessions, P.A.T.H.s and individual support plans).
- Services are “tailored” to fit the individual’s unique abilities and needs rather than individuals having to “fit” into inflexible service models.
- Employment (and Self-Employment) services are sustainable and persons in service have ongoing access to supports, as required.

B Focus supported employment services on work-force participation and community inclusion rather than indefinite training scenarios and segregated environments.

- Supports work toward competitive employment with wages that are consistent with regional labour standards and toward “real” work environments, -the most effective methods to teach and/or assess employment skills. (These methods are also the most effective for facilitating increased social inclusion in the work-place.)

NOTE: AASE does not consider sheltered or segregated employment to be a best practice.

3 - Intake and Assessment

A When meeting an individual seeking your service, provide him or her with as much information as possible about the nature, strengths and limitations of your service.

- Persons exploring a new service with an agency should have the opportunity to hear what your service philosophies and methodologies are before agreeing to that service. Establish definitions for success, and expectations for each other prior to entering any service agreement.
- The individual entering service and/or their guardian should sign a consent form for service.
- Service providers inform the individual and any representative present that it is the client’s right to rescind their consent any time they wish.

B Explore each individual's support needs and goals.

- Service providers make inquiry as to the individual's specific employment goals and support requirements.
- Service providers only accept clients for whom they have adequate resources to serve. Where the service provider does not possess adequate resources to serve the prospective client, they assist the individual to locate such services / resources (e.g., the service provider does not possess the resources to provide ongoing one-on-one support, but relies on brief training periods and ongoing natural supports instead. If the prospective client requires one-on-one supports, the service provider will refer them to a service which can better accommodate them.)

C Establish expectations, time-lines, and criteria for personal success.

What is the person's definition of successful employment support? (What outcomes will they expect – and within what time-frame? All of these issues are discussed and some mutual (documented) agreement arrived at.

- Service providers ensure that persons entering service are aware of – and accept – any expectations the service provider may have of them (including general employment expectations (punctuality, harmonious co-worker relations, etc.) Likewise, the client is made aware of what they can expect from the service provider – (e.g. client-directed service, respectful treatment, ongoing service as required, etc.)
- Prospective clients are advised how long will services be available to them.

3.2 Assessment and Career Planning

A The client's perceptions, capacities & aspirations are explored.

The starting point for all career planning is the individual job seeker.

B It is demonstrated that the occupational goals for individuals in service were determined by those individuals through consultation with them.

- Meetings and discussions are documented – personal profiles are developed and signed by the person in service witness documented employment goals.

C "Informed Choice" is facilitated in order to ensure that persons with limited experience (& limited ability to envision untried vocations) are fully aware of the range of options and supports available to them.

- Service providers explore and document the individual's work history and degree of satisfaction with past jobs / experiences.
- Service providers explain career exploration and the range of available options with the individual.

D Conduct all assessment and planning in a manner which reflects person-centred support, choice and self-determination. Service providers will respect the consumer's time and preferences in this regard.

- Service providers make every effort to utilize existing assessments in an effort to minimize demands on the consumer's time. Assessment processes are often unpleasant for the individual.
- Individuals in service are asked for their consent prior to the administration of a new assessment.
- Service providers are able to demonstrate that the chosen planning process is acceptable to the consumer and relevant to that consumer's employment goals.
- Reasonable time limits are adhered to for situational assessments and work experiences (for less than the region's standard minimum wage).
- Service providers do not subject individuals, who clearly articulate what type of work they want and give reasonable evidence that they can perform such work, to assessment against their wishes.

E Foster and facilitate career goals within the context of an individual's lifestyle, non-work priorities, goals and commitments.

- At the onset of service, the individual's goals and current life priorities /commitments are explored and documented to ensure that service reflects these goals and any required accommodations.

4 - Career Development

A Supported Employment Service Providers must facilitate the transition from effective career exploration to effective career development in order to assist persons with disabilities to achieve the greatest level of inclusion, financial gain and job satisfaction.

Developing a career is different from merely facilitating employment. A career typically involves a progression of related jobs (or positions) which offer increasing levels of benefits, responsibility, and prestige.

- All aspects of employment support reflect (beyond labour market participation) and facilitate of career development.
- Various methods are used to documentation/track and demonstrate the service recipient's career development (e.g. individual support plans, career advancement plans, and job satisfaction and service evaluations.)

5 - Job Marketing and Placement

A The service provider ensures as much involvement and input from the person being served as possible and markets specific individuals to employment settings which match the (documented) choices of those individuals, rather than acquiring job promises from employers and then applying that employment to persons in service.

B Marketing approaches concentrate on the personnel needs of the employer and the unique skills, abilities, attributes and potential of the person being marketed.

- Resumes or Employment Proposals are utilized in the marketing Process and job interviews are facilitated so that prospective employers and employees have the opportunity to determine if this is a suitable "match" for each of them.

C Employers are informed as to the philosophies of "inclusion" and "natural supports" as well as to the extent and duration of any training, follow-up, or monitoring supports available through the service provider.

6 - Job Training and Follow-Up Supports

A Access to these supports should be on an "as-needed" basis and not subject to time limitations, (i.e. an individual who has held a job for three months and now requires some additional training / support due to increased duties and responsibilities should be able to re-access said supports.)

B Training needs are determined with the employer and the person in service. All professional supports in this area are designed to facilitate natural supports and sustainability of the placement.

- Ideally the employer would address training as per their usual orientation plan for new employees, with the service provider consulting to increase successes and outcomes in this area. It may be necessary in some circumstances for the service provider to enter the work environment to assist with training. This intervention should be implemented in a manner which increases the new employee's connections and inclusion in the workplace – rather than segregate them from their co-workers.
- Effective Follow-Up supports are contingent upon developing an effective working relationship and consulting role with the employer. Establishing expectations of each other and developing trust is essential. Once the employer's expectations of the service provider have been agreed upon – they must be adhered to.

C Evaluation of the work placement is based on two crucial elements; the employee's enjoyment / investment in the job – and their ability to meet performance and workplace culture expectations (with reasonable accommodation and support.)

- Performance expectations for the new employee should be established as soon as possible and should generally be consistent with the expectations the employer has of similar positions. Supplemental training by the service provider should not continue once this performance “base-line” is being met by the new employee. (Some accommodation around certain tasks and duties may be required.)
- Expectations around workplace culture should be established with the new employee as quickly as possible. These expectations include – but are not limited to – issues such as protocols for lateness and absence, conflict management, chain of command, coffee and cigarette breaks etc.
- Appropriate Follow-Up supports include, but are not limited to...
 - Emotional support, goal setting and encouragement
 - Mediation, advocacy and conflict resolution
 - Helping to develop skills and social competencies
 - Development of natural supports in the work environment
 - Helping employers develop reasonable accommodations

Note: This is a living document and AASE welcomes your feedback in order to ensure that the best practices contained herein are updated as necessary and reflect the opinions and values of the entire supported employment community.