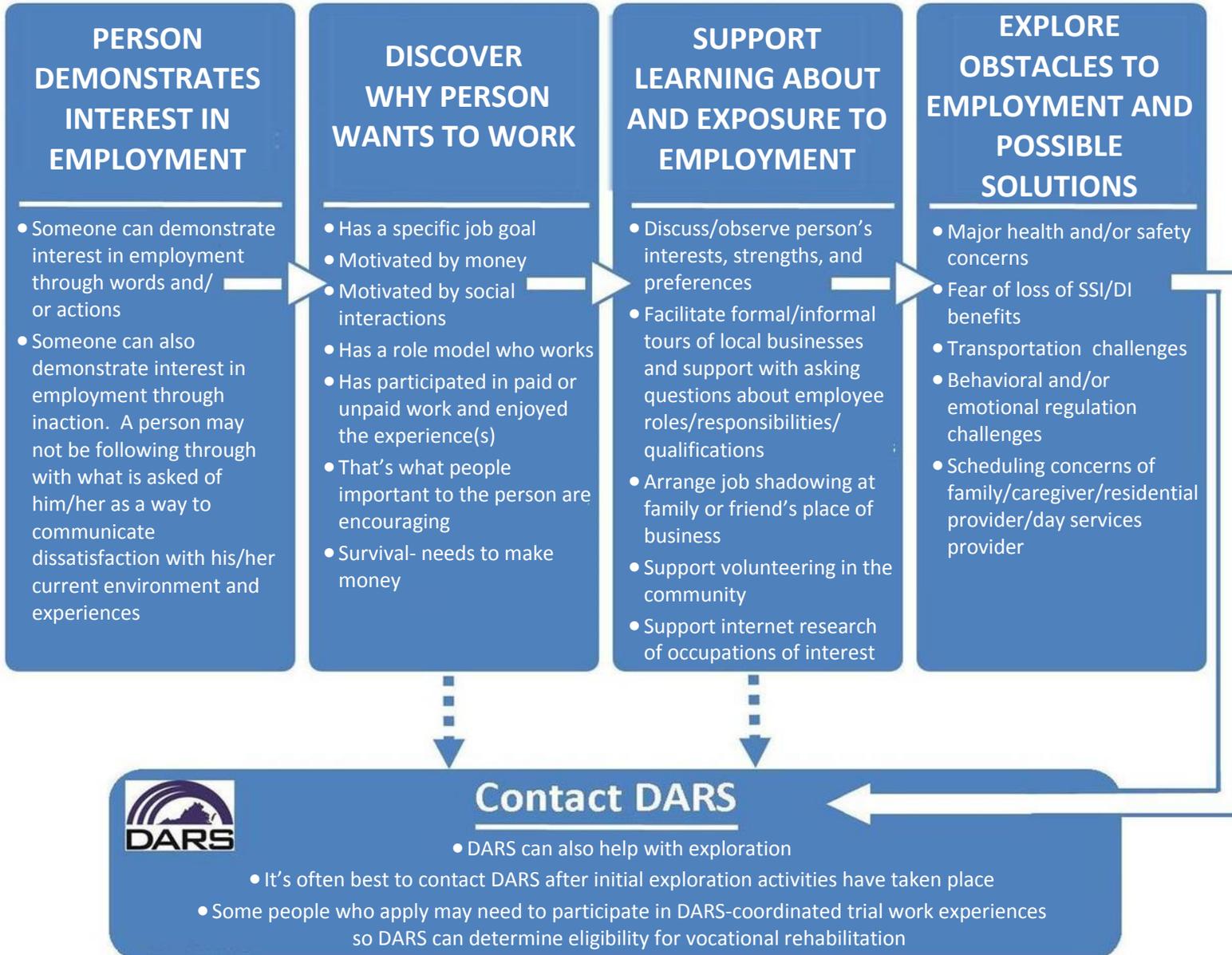
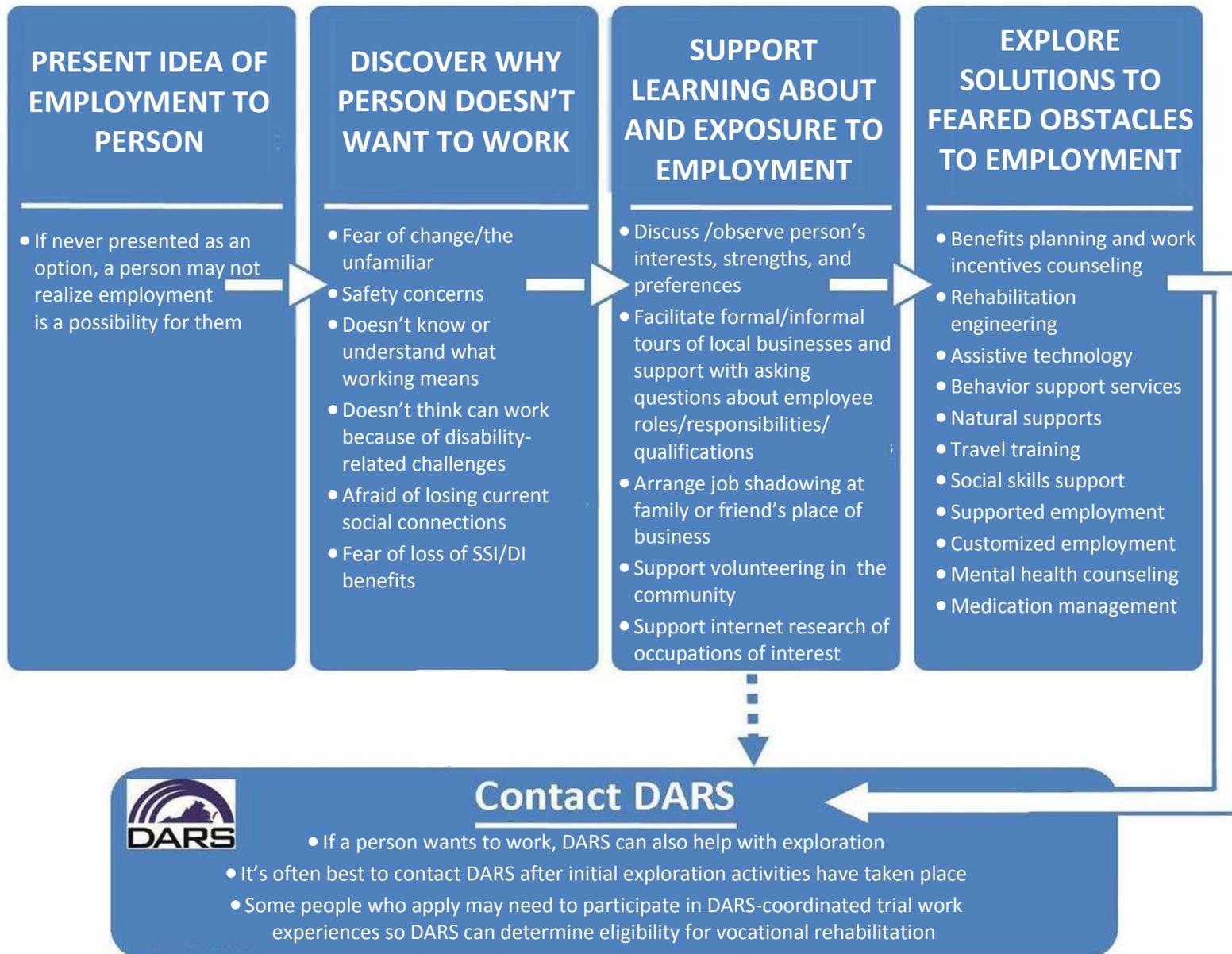


# SUPPORTING INFORMED CHOICES ABOUT EMPLOYMENT

## SCENARIO 1: PERSON IS INTERESTED IN EMPLOYMENT



## SCENARIO 2: PERSON DOES NOT INITIALLY *SEEM* INTERESTED IN EMPLOYMENT



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## **Guidance for Supporting Informed Choices about Employment**

This resource is to provide guidance on how to best support Virginians with disabilities with exploring employment. In congruence with the Employment First initiative, is a framework for systems change that is centered on the premise that all people, including individuals with significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in integrated employment and community life, we want employment to be the first priority and preferred outcome of and for Virginians with disabilities. Therefore, employment is something we encourage all Virginians to explore. Informed choice and Employment First go hand-in-hand. We want people to make informed decisions about working. Making an informed decision involves people knowing and understanding their options. Many people need to have real-life experiences in order to make truly informed decisions. Thus, it is imperative that those who support persons with disabilities in paid or unpaid capacities, such as family members, friends, teachers, case managers/support coordinators, day services providers, and vocational rehabilitation professionals, help people with disabilities understand what working means and support them with exploring potential obstacles to overcome in order to achieve employment.

It is optimal to utilize all available resources and partners (paid and unpaid) to support people in exploring their interest in employment. This promotes thorough exploration, increased experiential opportunities that will facilitate informed decision making, and greater collaboration on how to best support people with achieving employment.

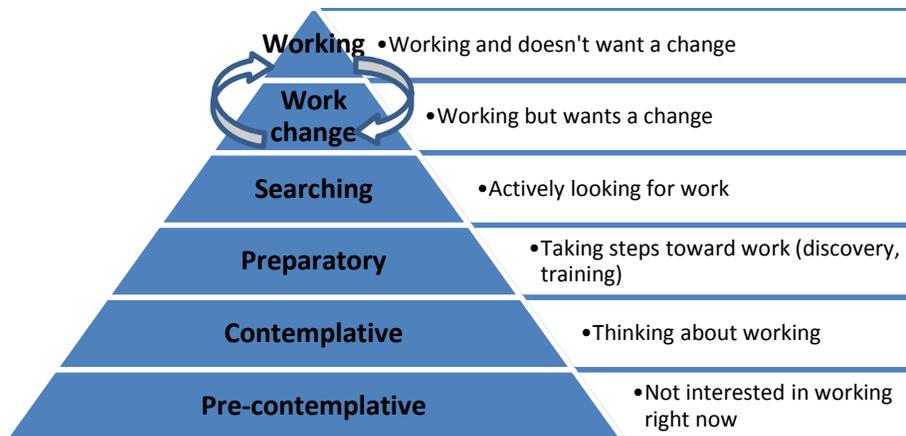
Some people may be able to come to an informed decision about wanting to work sooner than others, so this exploration process must be individualized. Once it is clear an informed decision about wanting to work has been made, the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) should be contacted. While this recommended exploration is highly encouraged, it is not a requirement for a referral to DARS. DARS can be contacted at any time.

People who make the informed decision not to pursue employment should be assisted in exploring community engagement opportunities (as should those who are interested in both employment and community engagement). Those who initially decide against employment should be encouraged to re-explore the idea of working in the future.

### **Please remember...**

- This document serves to provide general guidance only. Each person's situation should be approached individually in order to determine the appropriate steps to take and planning partners to involve.
- This process and the decisions that result should be team-based, with the person with the disability leading the decision-making to the greatest extent possible.
- Person-centered thinking and planning are critical. Person-centered thinking is a philosophy that supports people having positive control over their lives. It means listening to and observing people to discover what is truly important to them. Person-centered planning is the process of helping people set goals and develop action steps that will enable them to achieve the lives they most desire. As such, a person-centered framework is integral to genuinely supporting informed decision making.

- The success of the exploration process is largely dependent upon all involved team members engaging in open and consistent communication and collaboration. Equally important is for team members to have a positive attitude and willingly meet the person where he or she is at. Our expectations and attitude matter, as high expectations and a belief that a person can work are two of the greatest factors in whether a person works, regardless of disability or diagnosis.
- People have different communication preferences. For example, some articulate their thoughts and feelings verbally, some demonstrate their preferences through their actions or inaction and others prefer technology to assist with communication. In order to truly understand the goals of the people we work with, we must know how they best communicate and foster communication with them in a manner that matches their preferences.
- Behavior is a form of communication. Just because people may not be following through with what is asked of them does not mean they are incapable of performing in competitive work environments. Lack of follow through or adherence to rules could indicate one is not interested in the activity at hand, is dissatisfied with the current environment or that there are other stressors occurring in the person's life that are impeding full participation and follow through. Strive to understand the motivation of and meaning behind any demonstrated behavioral challenges and when necessary, link people with qualified behavior support providers. This will help people achieve the life they desire.
- Hard and soft skills can be developed on the job and do not have to be a prerequisite to support someone with employment. This is especially the case for people who have difficulty generalizing what they learn and thus need to learn skills in the environment in which they will be performing them.
- There are differences between adult services and youth/school services. Adult services, such as DARS, are eligibility based and not entitlement programs. With adult services, the person with the disability is the service recipient and must be involved with all meetings, services and decision making (regardless of guardianship).
- There are stages of change. Meet people where they are at and understand that their employment goals and preferences may change over time. It is the goals and preferences the person has decided on through the result of informed choice that should guide how we support someone in achieving the life they want.



Adapted from: Informed Choice & Employment, Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2016

## Interest in Employment is Demonstrated... What Comes Next?

People can demonstrate interest in employment through words, actions or inaction. Just because someone does not or is not able to verbally articulate a desire to work does not mean the person is not interested in or capable of employment. Examples of how people can demonstrate interest in employment include, but are not limited to:

- Showing interest in and curiosity for a job(s) in the community
- Understanding the concept of earning money and being motivated by this
- Demonstrating enjoyment for making and/or spending money
- Showing frustration when others have funds to make purchases and they do not
- Demonstrating strong attendance at school or day services
- Demonstrating attentiveness to tasks
- Demonstrating enjoyment in completing tasks
- Engaging in hobbies that could translate to employment
- Demonstrating follow through with chores
- Showing willingness to take actions to prepare for employment, such as by developing soft skills
- Demonstrating dissatisfaction in day services, such as by not engaging in activities or engaging in maladaptive behaviors
- Demonstrating enjoyment doing volunteer/unpaid work

When people first demonstrate interest in employment, it is important to discover how they came to the conclusion they want to work. It is helpful to learn why they want to work and whether the decisions regarding employment were informed. Here are some potential reasons why people may feel they want to work:

- Have a specific job goal
- Motivated by earning money
- Motivated by social interactions
- Have a role model who works
- Have participated in paid or unpaid work and enjoyed the experience(s)
- That's what people important to them are encouraging
- Survival- needs to earn money to support self/family
- Want to get off of public assistance programs

Once you have discovered why someone wants to work, if the person has limited knowledge of and experience with employment, now is the time to support him/her with learning more about what working means, what interests the person about working and common employer expectations. This exploration will go a long way in helping the person achieve the life he or she desires. This process of exploration can be supported by a variety of planning partners and support providers. Here are some examples:

- Families and Personal Networks-support your loved ones with engaging in experiences that will increase their exposure to the world of work. For example, coordinate job shadowing at a family or friend's place of business and/or support volunteer activities in the community. For additional information on how to support your loved ones, refer to Attachment Five.
- Educators-coordinate appropriate transition assessments to identify students' strengths, interests and preferences. This information will help shape goals and determine optimal activities to support students with moving closer to reaching their dreams. Create employment-related goals and activities on the Individualized Education Programs that will help the students learn about, prepare for and have exposure to work. For additional information about promoting successful transitions to employment, refer to Attachment Six.
- Case Managers/Support Coordinators- use the Person Centered (PC) Planning process and Individual Service Plan (ISP) to identify and develop employment-related and readiness goals that will help people learn about work. You can also coordinate services that will support people with learning about and developing/improving on skills that promote positive employment outcomes. For information about how to do this, refer to Attachments Six and Seven and the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services PC ISP Training Packet (the link to this packet is available in the *Additional Resources* section of this guide). In addition, coordinating services to support Discovery-like activities can help people and teams better understand the strengths, preferences, motivation, challenges, available community resources, etc... of the individuals we work with. This information can be extremely useful in helping people with disabilities achieve employment. To learn more about Discovery, refer to Attachment Eleven.
- Day Services Providers- help people participate in learning experiences that will further prepare them for work. You can facilitate learning about the variety of community-based employment opportunities by organizing visits to different employment environments. Point out positive employee attributes as you see them being displayed by workers in the community. You can also help coordinate and support people in participating in volunteer activities in the community. Always reinforce positive work behaviors. For additional ideas, refer to Attachments Seven and Eight.
- Sheltered Employment Providers- help people learn about employment-related and readiness skills and help them develop professional attributes desired by employers. Always reinforce positive work behaviors. For additional ideas, refer to Attachments Seven.
- Residential Providers- facilitate opportunities for people to learn about the variety of opportunities for work in the community by organizing opportunities to explore different employment environments. Discuss professional attributes desired by employers. Reinforce skills development through encouragement of participation in household management activities, such as chores, meal planning and completing errands in the community. You can also support people in engaging in volunteer activities of interest in the community. For additional ideas, refer to Attachments Seven and Eight.

For people who indicate they do not want to work, it is also important to be sure these decisions are informed ones. Just as with people who demonstrate interest in employment, we want to discover why people (or their support systems) are opposed to working. Examples of why some people think they do not want to work include, but are not limited to:

- Fear of change/the unfamiliar
- Safety concerns
- Not knowing or understanding what working means
- Not thinking they can work because of disability-related challenges or because of being consistently told they are not capable of working in the community
- Fear of losing current social connections
- Fear of losing Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)

The employment exploration examples included in this guide should be used to support informed decision making for those who are expressing disinterest in employment but they do not fully understand what they are saying no to. After all, learning accurate information about what working means and opportunities and experiences available through employment may result in people realizing they do in fact want to work.

The earlier people look at obstacles that may impede employment success, the better. Identifying potential obstacles and concerns a person or team member may have and taking a proactive approach to addressing these can be very helpful in promoting a smooth transition to work. With the right support, most obstacles and concerns can be overcome. Identified challenges do not need to be fully resolved in order for a person to apply for services with DARS. Frequently, the services and supports available through DARS will help the person overcome the challenges. However, it is ideal when teams recognize potential obstacles early so they can begin brainstorming and implementing solutions.

Common obstacles to and concerns about employment that are worthwhile to acknowledge and seek resolutions to include:

- Major medical concerns/issues
- Fear of losing SSI/SSDI or other forms of public assistance
- Transportation challenges
- Behavioral challenges
- Scheduling concerns of family/personal network, residential providers or day service providers
- Fear person will be isolated or not have the same social connections as those often found through day services
- Fear for person's safety in the community

As previously mentioned, with the right support and services, most obstacles can be overcome and concerns appropriately addressed. Here are some examples:

- Fears people with disabilities or their support networks may have about losing SSI/DI benefits can be addressed through benefits and work incentives counseling services. Work Incentives Specialist Advocates (WISAs) can help people learn the facts about work incentives and employment supports that allow individuals with disabilities to remain in control of their

finances and health care. For instance, the Ticket to Work program is a resource that can help Social Security beneficiaries go to work and become financially independent, all while they keep their Medicare or Medicaid.

- Behavioral challenges can often be addressed through specialized behavior support services, such as Positive Behavior Supports and Applied Behavior Analysis.
- Concern that a person will be isolated in an integrated employment setting and not have the same social connections available through day services can be addressed by providing the person with support and education in fostering relationships with co-workers and joining non-disability-specific (and disability-specific if that is preferred) social groups that exist outside of their work hours.

Fortunately, most obstacles do not have to be permanent barriers to employment. Through acknowledging and discussing fears and concerns and providing education in the wide array of services, supports and community resources available, many people will realize employment can be a reality.

Another area that is beneficial for people and teams to understand are employers' expectations. Employers' expectations of their employees have evolved over time and particularly since the workforce changed as a result of the 2008 recession. The major shifts have included an increased emphasis on multi-tasking, greater productivity with reduced personnel and higher customer satisfaction standards. These changes can be seen as obstacles, but are also opportunities for placement techniques, such as Supported Employment and Customized Employment. For more information about Supported and Customized Employment, refer to Attachments Eight and Nine.

DARS can also help with the exploration process. It is often best to contact DARS after an informed decision about wanting to work has been made. As an adult service provider, DARS is an eligibility-based program. If DARS has concerns about a person's ability to benefit from vocational rehabilitation (VR) services in terms of an employment outcome, Trial work experiences will be facilitated. A Trial Work Experiences Plan is jointly developed by the DARS counselor, the applicant and identified team members. The purpose of Trial Work Experiences Plan is to support the person with exploring his or her abilities, capabilities and capacity to perform in realistic work situations. The focus of the Trial Work Experiences Plan is less on the applicant's desired employment goals and more on whether he or she will be able to achieve an employment outcome with the support of services available through DARS.

If determined eligible for services, DARS will help support people with achieving competitive integrated employment. Working with DARS is a partnership. Clients must be engaged in their employment preparation and acquisition process.

If a person and his or her team decide now is not the time to pursue competitive integrated employment or through the process of trial work experiences and team collaboration it is determined that at the present time a person is not able to benefit from VR services in terms of an employment outcome, employment can and should be re-explored in the future. DARS can provide suggestions about areas for growth and community resources to help support the individual. Once there has been demonstrated change, the person should be re-connected with DARS. Refer to Attachments One through Four to learn more about DARS' VR program.

## Attachment 1: Services DARS Provides

DARS' VR program assists people with disabilities with preparing for, finding and maintaining employment. This is an eligibility program, not an entitlement program. The eligibility criteria are:

- Applicant is legally eligible to work in the United States;
- Applicant has a physical, mental or emotional impairment;
- The impairment is keeping the person from working;
- Applicant is willing and able to work and thinks DARS' services can help; and
- Applicant is present in Virginia (living, working, going to school or moving to Virginia).

VR services through DARS are short term. This means that people's cases do not remain open for their whole lives. A case is closed once the person is working and stable on the job. A case could also be closed if the person is no longer interested in services, is not following through with services or it is determined the person can no longer benefit from services in terms of an employment outcome.

The services DARS' VR program provides are individualized based on each client's unique needs. All clients receive counseling and guidance to help them make appropriate decisions concerning their employment goals. Additional services that may be implemented as deemed necessary are listed below. An asterisk denotes there may be a cost associated with the service.

- Physical and mental restoration\*
- Vocational evaluation/career exploration
- Situational assessment
- Educational or vocational training\*
- Job seeking skills training
- Job placement assistance (does not include on-the-job supports)
- Job coaching\*
- Rehabilitation engineering and assistive technology\*
- Soft skills instruction\*
- Therapeutic behavior support services\*

To continue receiving assistance from DARS, clients must:

- Remain interested in working and receiving help from DARS;
- Keep appointments and be on time; and
- Follow through with agreed upon responsibilities. If a person is unable to follow through, s/he must notify his or her DARS counselor so together they can explore what is getting in the way of successful follow through.

Services DARS does not provide are:

- Prevocational services
- Sheltered employment services
- Long term follow along services
- Any ongoing services, such as continued transportation to/from work

## Attachment 2: Steps to Vocational Rehabilitation

### Referral

- Informational meetings should be coordinated when a potential applicant needs to more fully explore if DARS' VR program offers the assistance the person is looking for. Informational meetings can also help potential applicants and their teams determine if now is the best time for the person to apply for services with DARS or if there are benefits to being linked with other agencies and services first.

### Intake

- Application for VR services is completed.
- Applicant and the team of supports discuss the person's strengths, employment interests, goals, disability, education, paid and unpaid work history and vocational rehabilitation needs.
- DARS counselor discusses VR services, consumer financial participation policy and the applicant's rights and responsibilities.
  - Ideally it is best for parents/caregivers and Case Managers/Support Coordinators to attend the DARS intake. If an Employment Service Organization (ESO) or Day Services provider is working with the applicant, it is also helpful to have a representative from those agencies who know the person well participate in the intake. If the applicant is still in school, it is important to have someone from the school who knows the person well participate in the intake. However, the decision of who participates in the intake meeting should be made on an individual basis. If having a lot of people present will be anxiety provoking or detrimental to the applicant's ability to participate in the meeting, then a smaller group should initially meet. The applicant can then sign a release for the counselor to be able to speak with other members of the support team at a different time.

### Eligibility determination

- Information shared by the applicant and his/her support team during the intake and application process and his/her records will be used by DARS to learn about the person's disability, how it affects his or her work capabilities and whether VR services can help the person become employed. If additional information is needed in order for the DARS counselor to determine eligibility, the counselor will coordinate how to gather this information with the applicant and the team.
- A counselor has 60 days to determine eligibility. However, this time frame can be extended if the counselor needs to collect additional records in order to make an eligibility determination. The counselor must communicate a need for an extension with the applicant.
- To help expedite the time it takes for an applicant's eligibility to be determined, all pertinent records should be submitted to the counselor at the intake meeting. As available and applicable, records should include the most recent:
  - Psychological/neuropsychological evaluation
  - Social history report
  - Medical records that pertain to the disability

- Mental health records
- Individualized Education Program (if in school or graduated within the past five years)
- Person Centered Plan
- Virginia Individual DD Eligibility Survey (VIDES)
- Supports Intensity Scale
- Assessments completed by an ESO or Day Services provider

### **Order of Selection**

- When a state does not have sufficient funds to meet the needs of all people seeking services, a plan must be initiated to serve those people with the most need first.
- DARS has been under Order of Selection since 2004.
- DARS categorizes its wait list based on need. There are three priority categories. Contact your local DARS office to determine the current status of the three categories.
- If categories are closed, when an applicant is eligible to come off the wait list is determined by the priority category the person is assigned to and the date of application for services.

### **Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)**

- Once off the wait list, the client, DARS counselor and relevant team members will collaborate to determine an employment goal that is a viable match for the person.
- Sometimes people participate in assessments and evaluations to help identify the ideal type of employment for the person.
- The current labor market is taken into consideration when identifying a viable employment goal.
- The client's support needs are taken into consideration when developing the IPE and necessary services and supports to address one's needs are included in the IPE.
- Some services have a cost associated to them. Depending on a client's and his or her family's financial situation, DARS and/or the client is responsible for paying for cost services. The party responsible for sponsoring cost services must be determined with the client and the team at the time of IPE development.
- Only services necessary to help a person prepare for, obtain and maintain employment are included in the employment plan.
- By signing the IPE, the client is showing that the IPE planning decisions were made jointly with the counselor and the client is agreeing to take the steps in the plan to become employed.
- The IPE is a working document. It can be amended as the client and counselor see fit and agree upon.

### **Services**

- Services identified on the IPE commence once the IPE is signed.
- When it is time for the job search, the DARS counselor assists and supports the client with the search, but it is the client's responsibility to actively participate in the job search to greatest

extent possible and to utilize his or her network (to include family members and friends) to assist with attaining employment.

- When needed, clients can be linked with a job coach to provide them with more intensive support with their job search, acquisition and retention process. Job coaching is a cost service.
- Once employed, the person's DARS case will remain open for a minimum of 90 days to make sure the job is a good fit and the person receives the assistance needed for a smooth transition to work.

### **Closure**

- For a client receiving supported employment services, once s/he is stable on the job (meaning necessary supports have plateaued), the person will move into long-term follow-along services. DARS will keep the person's case open for an additional 90 days to ensure stability on the job. Long-term follow-along supports will continue even when the person's case is closed with DARS.
- Other reasons a person's case can be closed include if DARS determines the person is no longer eligible for services, services will not result in employment or the person is not meeting his or her responsibilities.

### **Re-opening a DARS case**

- A person can request to have his or her case re-opened under Post Employment Services (PES) if:
  - PES is necessary to reduce or remove an impediment to employment and is needed for the person to maintain, regain or advance in employment that is consistent with his/her strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities and interests;
  - The most recent DARS case was closed in Closed-Rehabilitated status (the person was successfully employed);
  - The person's physical or mental condition is stable or slowly progressive, and there is no new and distinct disabling condition;
  - The provision of PES is directly related to the primary disability; and
  - The rehabilitation needs do not require a complex or comprehensive provision of services and service needs are limited in scope and duration.
- If a person does not meet the criteria for PES, he or she can re-apply for services. The process of re-applying is the same as when someone first applies for services with DARS.

Note: If a person's case was closed as not able to benefit from services in terms of an employment outcome and the person re-applies for services, the DARS counselor will want to know what has changed to indicate now is a better time to seek employment.

### **Attachment 3: Rights of a DARS Customer**

1. I can bring a family member, friend or advocate to meetings with my counselor (or other DARS representative).
2. I (and my authorized representative) have a right to fully participate in all decisions about my vocational rehabilitation (including eligibility, job goal, service needs, service providers, Employment Plan, case closure and closed case review). I will ask questions when I do not understand something so I can make informed choices.
3. I will be notified of my appeal rights at application; Employment Plan development, revision, and review; case closure; and whenever my counselor and I cannot reach a mutually acceptable decision about my vocational rehabilitation.
4. I will receive a copy of my Employment Plan and any changes. My counselor and I must sign and date the Employment Plan and any change before it can go into effect. My counselor and I must review my Employment Plan annually (or sooner if I request it).
5. I have a right to request a copy of information from my DARS case file (including evaluations and service provider reports), except information I am not legally allowed to see.
6. I may ask to see DARS policies that relate to my vocational rehabilitation.
7. At any time, I can ask for assistance from the Client Assistance Program (CAP) at the disAbility Law Center of Virginia. I may call or write the nearest CAP office. CAP staff can
  - Tell me about DARS services and my rights and responsibilities.
  - Help me resolve problems when my vocational rehabilitation is not progressing satisfactorily.
  - Work with my counselor and me to reach a mutually agreeable decision.
  - Represent me if I choose to appeal a DARS decision about my case.
8. I can ask my counselor to arrange reasonable accessibility and communication accommodations needed for my vocational rehabilitation. Except where the law says it is OK, my counselor cannot give confidential personal information about me or my DARS case to others unless I agree in writing. I can withdraw my permission at any time. However, if I choose to keep certain information confidential, it may affect the types of services I can receive.
9. If DARS closed my case because I reached my vocational goal but I am employed at less than minimum wage due to my productivity, DARS will automatically schedule a yearly review of my closed case the first two years after closure. I have the right to participate in the reviews.
10. If DARS closed my case based on a finding that I am not currently able to achieve employment, once every twelve months I can ask DARS to consider re-opening my case. I have the right to participate in the review. DARS will automatically schedule the first review unless I have refused services, I refused the review, I am no longer present in Virginia or my medical condition is rapidly progressive or terminal.

## **Attachment 4: Responsibilities of a DARS Customer**

1. I agree to keep, and be on time for, all of my appointments with my counselor and service providers. If I cannot make an appointment or need to be absent from training or other service, I will tell my counselor right away.
2. To keep receiving vocational rehabilitation services, I must make satisfactory progress towards evaluating my eligibility and service needs and setting and reaching my vocational goal. I will follow through with the steps my counselor and I agree are needed. I will tell my counselor if I am having trouble doing something I am asked to do.
3. I must tell my counselor about changes which could affect my program, (such as a change in my address, other benefits and funding sources, job status, disability or general health, financial situation, my support network, etc...).
4. I must help my counselor find and use other funding sources when required by federal law and DARS policy. I agree to provide information about benefits (Worker's Compensation, Social Security, Welfare, Veterans Benefits, personal injury lawsuits, medical insurance, grants and scholarships, etc.) I receive during my vocational rehabilitation. If I choose not to provide such information, it may affect the types of services my counselor can provide.
5. I may have to pay some or all of the cost of certain services. I agree to answer all my counselor's questions about my financial situation and family size and provide proof when asked. If I choose not to provide this information, I may qualify only for services DARS offers free of charge.
6. I agree to take care of any tools, equipment and other supplies I receive. I will tell my counselor if I stop using an item or if it needs repair or replacement. (DARS may, but is not obligated to, pay for repair or replacement.) If I stop using an item or I drop out of my DARS program, I must return items to DARS upon request.

## **Attachment 5: Supporting a Loved One with Exploring Employment**

### **Getting the conversation started:**

Conversations are a great place to start when working with someone who is interested in becoming employed. It is helpful for the person with a disability to answer questions that provide team members insight into his/her interests, preferences, goals, motivators, career areas of curiosity and past experiences and challenges. This will enable teams to identify how to best support the person with gaining the additional information and experiences needed to make informed decisions about employment. Here are some questions a person can answer to help gather important information:

- What are things I enjoy and do well?
- What would other people say I am good at?
- What is my ideal/dream job?
- What kind of jobs would I not want?
- Why do I want to work?
- What are my paid, unpaid, and volunteer work experiences? What went well with these experiences and what was challenging?
- Who do I know who may have a contact who could be helpful in finding a job?
- Are my family and/or support system motivated to help me get and keep a job?
- How will I get to and from work?
- Is there anything that worries me about working?
- What supports will I need to be successful?

If a person does not communicate verbally, observing him or her participating in preferred activities and in favored environments and speaking with those who know the person well can reveal very useful information.

### **Promoting exposure to the world of work:**

Conversations about employment and employment goals are important, but conversations do not replace experiences. This is particularly true for people who seem to have the most significant barriers to employment, such as people with behavioral, communication and/or medical challenges (Oregon Employment Discussion Guide, January 2015). There are many ways to facilitate experiences that allow people exposure to the world of work, and thus promote informed decisions about goals. Here are some ways families and friends can support loved a one in learning about what work means and identifying areas of interest:

- Facilitating formal and informal tours of businesses and supporting the person with asking questions about employees' roles, responsibilities and qualifications
- Arranging job shadowing experiences at a family or friend's place of business
- Coordinating a visit to the local American Job Center to learn about the labor market and in-demand occupations
- Supporting volunteering in the community
- Facilitating internet research about occupations of interest to the person

## **Attachment 6: Promoting Successful Transitions to Employment through Secondary Education**

Using appropriate transition assessments can help identify a student's strengths, interests and preferences. Assessments can also help identify a student's needs. This information can be used to help students and teams determine activities to support the student in making the progress needed to successfully transition to employment. Below are examples of post-secondary employment, education, training and independent living goals.

Employment: After high school, Mary will be employed part-time delivering reading materials from the library to the residents of a community nursing home with the assistance of a job coach.

Education: After graduation and exiting high school, Mary will receive instruction on various types of reading materials that people checkout from the library.

Training: After exiting high school, Mary will complete training on organizing reading material by the residents who utilize the library cart services.

Independent Living: Upon completion of high school, Mary will learn to utilize public transportation, including the public bus.

Annual IEP goals can address specific transition needs. For example, given Mary's postsecondary goal in the domain of independent living, an appropriate and corresponding annual IEP goal would be:

- Given travel training situations, Mary will demonstrate socially appropriate behavior by being polite and maintaining personal boundaries with strangers while utilizing public transportation. Mary will demonstrate this at least two times across three opportunities. Examples of socially appropriate behavior include:
  - greeting the bus driver and person Mary sits next to;
  - if Mary answers a cell phone call, keeping her voice to a low level;
  - if Mary converses with other riders, sticking to topics that do not divulge personal information about herself;
  - when the bus is not crowded, maintaining at least an arm's length distance from other riders and
  - not putting her bags or belongings in a vacant seat if another rider needs a place to sit.

While still in school, Mary can be supported with moving closer to reaching her vocational goal by receiving assistance with preparing a set of questions to ask a person already doing the work she desires, setting up a job shadowing experience and/or participating in worksite assessments and work-based learning experiences.

## Attachment 7: Suggested Support Activities to Help Prepare for Employment

Below are some suggested skills you can develop learning experiences around that will help a person prepare for paid employment. These activities can be incorporated into one's Shared Plan. Please remember that some people with developmental disabilities have difficulty generalizing skills to different environments, so mastering of these skills should not be a requirement to move forward with seeking employment.

- Communication skills
  - Practice appropriately greeting peers
  - Practice modulating voice volume to an acceptable level for a working environment
  - When an augmentative device is used, work with the person to identify and program greetings and phrases appropriate for a work setting and facilitate activities that will enable the person to practice appropriately using these phrases
  - Practicing professional phone skills
  - Practice giving, receiving and asking for clarification of directions
  - Develop an awareness of verbal and nonverbal communication
  - Practicing professional email communication
  - Practice making eye contact when speaking
- Interpersonal skills
  - Explore ways to appropriately handle conflict
    - Role play challenging situations that may occur on the job
    - Practice coping skills like counting to ten and deep breathing
  - Participate in team activities to learn how to take turns, work with others and be a gracious winner or loser
  - Explore different cultures
- Work skills
  - Complete chores at home that are related to jobs in the community
    - Fold laundry
    - Put away groceries
    - Prepare food
    - Follow a list to complete designated chores
  - Participate in activities in the community that build independence and are related to employment
    - Help shop for household groceries
    - Pay for groceries and other items purchased in the community
    - Complete personal banking transactions, such as using an ATM
  - Participate in activities through a day services program that build work skills and awareness
    - Volunteer in the community
    - Participate in team activities
    - Practice professional communication skills
- Time management skills
  - Follow a schedule
  - Use alarms to help adhere to a schedule
  - Learn how long it takes to get ready

- Professional appearance
  - Identify what is appropriate attire for the season and for various work environments
  - Identify items in wardrobe that are professional
  - Practice wearing outfits that are work appropriate
- Lifelong learning
  - Research possible employment in the area
  - Complete practice applications
  - Tour different employment establishments and observe people doing various jobs
  - Use every day activities at home and in day services programs to build skills
  - Explore post-secondary training options

## **Attachment 8: How Day Services and Residential Providers Can Support Exploring Employment**

Below are examples of activities that can help a person explore and achieve employment. These activities can be incorporated into one's Shared Plan.

Mary wants to work in a restaurant. Below are suggested activities for Mary to participate in with the support of her day services and residential providers:

### Day Services:

- Mary tours various restaurants, observes tasks that are completed and asks employees questions about their jobs. Staff discuss with Mary what she liked at the restaurants and what additional information she needs to learn in order to identify if this is the right employment environment for her.
- Staff discuss with Mary what work activities she can practice at home and at her day services program so Mary can become more qualified for the job she wants.
- Staff help Mary identify and participate in volunteer activities at a local food kitchen or other setting that will allow Mary to complete restaurant-like tasks.

### Residential:

- Staff support Mary with exploring the skills needed for restaurant work and help her identify ways to further develop these skills. Activities could include Mary helping with preparing meals, setting the table for meals, serving food to her housemates, clearing the table after meals and doing the dishes.
- Mary is supported with remembering to thoroughly wash her hands after she uses the bathroom and before she participates in any activities in the kitchen.
- Mary is supported with identifying safety risks in the kitchen and adhering to safe practices in the kitchen.

Ricardo wants a job but is not sure what he would like to do. Below are suggested support activities to help Ricardo explore his interests and strengths.

### Ricardo volunteers

- Ricardo is supported with exploring various volunteer opportunities in his community and understanding what his responsibilities would be at each volunteer site.
- Ricardo is encouraged to try out different volunteer activities so he can make decisions about his interests based on real-life experiences.

### Ricardo completes tours of various work environments of interest

- Ricardo is supported in identifying work environments he wants to learn more about.

- Ricardo is supported in coordinating and participating in tours of work environments of interest.
- Ricardo is given an opportunity to ask questions during the tours.
- After each tour staff discuss with Ricardo his experience, what he learned, his preferences, how his strengths and skills relate to the types of jobs available at that place of employment and if there is any additional information Ricardo needs in order for him to make an informed decision about his interest in working in a similar environment.
- Staff help Ricardo identify if there are any skills he needs to develop or improve upon to be qualified for the different types of work that interest him. If there are skills to be developed/improved upon, staff will help Ricardo identify what he can do at home and at his day services program to improve in these areas and how staff can support him in this process. Staff also help Ricardo identify if on-the-job learning would be the most effective way for Ricardo to develop the skills needed for job retention.

## **Attachment 9: Supported Employment**

Taken from the *DRS Guide to Supported Employment and Job Coach Training Services*:

“Supported Employment (SE) services represent a valuable array of contemporary rehabilitation options. The goal is to maximize employment opportunities for persons with the most severe disabilities who require support in order to work in integrated, competitive employment. Unlike ‘evaluate-train-place’ models of rehabilitation services, Supported Employment assesses, then places and trains consumers.”

Supported Employment Description: “In the individual placement model, a single employee is placed in an integrated work setting in the community. The individual is employed by the business. Ongoing support services are provided by an employment specialist who is employed by an approved provider of supported employment services. The employment specialist typically provides the individual with initial job skill training on an intensive one-to-one basis for the entire workday. The employment specialist gradually decreases supports, as the individual becomes more proficient. Optimally, a system of “natural supports” is developed within the workplace and community, which facilitates success with extensive supports that are already occurring in the individual’s community.”

For additional information about Supported Employment, refer to the *DRS Guide to Supported Employment and Job Coach Training Services* which can be found at:

[http://www.vadrs.org/essp/downloads/SEGuide/SEGuide15\(FinalProvider\).pdf](http://www.vadrs.org/essp/downloads/SEGuide/SEGuide15(FinalProvider).pdf)

## **Attachment 10: Customized Employment**

The United States Department of Labor defines Customized Employment as “a flexible process designed to personalize the employment relationship between a job candidate and an employer in a way that meets the needs of both. It is based on an individualized match between the strengths, conditions, and interests of a job candidate and the identified business needs of an employer. Customized Employment utilizes an individualized approach to employment planning and job development — one person at a time . . . one employer at a time.”

Customized Employment can take many shapes. Task reassignment, job carving, job sharing and self-employment are all forms of Customized Employment. Task reassignment is when some of the job tasks of an organization’s workers are reassigned to a new employee. This reassignment allows the workers to focus on the critical functions of their jobs and provides an employment opportunity for a person with a disability who demonstrates strengths in the culled tasks. Task reassignment usually results in a newly created position. Job carving occurs when an existing job description is modified. At least one or more, but not all, of the tasks on the original job description are retained. Job sharing is when two or more people share the tasks and responsibilities of a job based on each other’s strengths. And finally, self-employment is when a person is supported in creating his/her own small business. A business is developed based on the strengths and goals of the person and the unmet need of the market.

For more information about Customized Employment, refer to the United States Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy website at:

<http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/customizedemployment.htm>

## **Attachment 11: Discovery**

Discovery is an evidenced-based process that involves getting to know a person before developing an employment goal. Discovery does not focus on what career, job or business would be best for this person, but rather answers the question: Who is this person? Discovery uses experiential situations in real environments to better understand a person's preferences, interests, skills, abilities, home and community resources and supports and accommodation needs. The information gathered through Discovery enables a complete picture of the person to emerge and provides direction in identifying an optimal employment goal.

### **Sample Activities for Discovery**

- A team meeting to gather initial information about the person, including his or her interests, skills and preferred environments and activities.
- Two to three visits made to the person's home to gain additional information about the person's routines, hobbies, family supports, activities and other perspectives related to his or her residence.
- Exploration of the person's neighborhood to determine local employment options, support services and transportation possibilities.
- Interviews with people, both paid and unpaid, who provide supports to the person and know him/her well.
- Observations of the person as s/he participates in typical life activities outside of the home (i.e., recreational activities, religious activities, etc..).

## Attachment 12: Social Security Benefits and Work Incentives Services

The Social Security Administration (SSA) administers two programs under the Social Security Act that provide benefits based on disability: the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) program and the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. The SSDI program provides payment of disability benefits to disabled individuals who are "insured" under the Social Security Act because they have worked and contributed to the Social Security trust fund through the Social Security tax on their earnings. The SSDI program also pays benefits to certain disabled dependents of insured individuals. The SSI program provides payments to disabled individuals (including children under age 18) who have limited income and resources.

Earning a wage will impact beneficiaries of these two programs. However, people currently receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) have various work incentives that are designed to assist them in obtaining or returning to gainful employment. These work incentives are complex and can overlap, depending on the individual, their needs, and/or their occupational goal. It is suggested that any person wishing to assist themselves or others with employment be familiar with the basic effects and rules of earned and/or unearned income on the benefits of these programs and how these programs overlap for individuals who are, or can become, eligible for both. It is also suggested that you work with the individual's Social Security Employment Support Representative or a claims representative whenever rendering advice on SSA regulations to validate that advice.

Work Incentives Specialist Advocates (WISAs) are individuals who have been certified to provide work incentives counseling services to DARS and/or the Virginia Department for Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) clients who are receiving SSDI and/or SSI benefits. WISAs can provide valuable information to help people and their teams of support better understand how someone's financial circumstances will change once the person goes to work. Virginia WISAs use WorkWORLD for the Web (WW), an online, Virginia specific program that provides accurate information on the impact that working will have on one's benefits. It is important to implement work incentives counseling early so people can make truly informed choices about going to work and understand the incentives in place that support entering or returning to the workforce.

To learn more about specific work incentives, see "Work Incentives – Detailed Information," available on SSA's website (<https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/detailedinfo.htm>). To learn about SSA's Ticket to Work, which is designed to assist individuals with disabilities who receive SSDI and/or SSI go to work, refer to [www.chooseworkttw.net](http://www.chooseworkttw.net). In addition, to learn more about accessing WISA services and available employment supports under the Ticket to Work program, contact your DARS or DBVI counselor.

For a complete description of SSA eligibility requirements, see the SSA publications: ***Understanding SSI, A Guide to SSI for Groups and Organizations, Disability*** and the ***Red Book on Employment Support***. Also, information may be obtained at "the work site" at [www.ssa.gov/work](http://www.ssa.gov/work) and the Red Book site at <https://www.ssa.gov/redbook/>.

## Attachment 13: Pre-Employment Transition Services

Pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) is a program (per Federal Regulation 34 § CFR 361.5 (c) (42)) in which DARS works in collaboration with the local educational agencies to provide or arrange for the provision of pre-employment transition activities for students with disabilities in need of these services who are eligible or potentially eligible for vocational rehabilitation services.

Required pre-employment transition services include:

- a. Job exploration counseling;
- b. Work-based learning experiences provided in an integrated environment to the maximum extent possible that may include:
  - i. In-school and after school opportunities,
  - ii. Experiences outside of the traditional school setting, and
  - iii. Internships;
- c. Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs;
- d. Workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living skills; and
- e. Instruction in self-advocacy, including peer mentoring and instruction in person centered planning.

For more information on Pre-ETS refer to:

- The Virginia DARS Policy and Procedures Manual-  
<https://sp.wvrc.net/VRmanual/layouts/15/start.aspx#/SitePages/Chapter%208.24%20Transition%20Services.aspx#p1aA3> and
- The Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center-  
<http://www.wintac.org/topic-areas/pre-employment-transition-services>

## Attachment 14: Additional Resources

The ARC of Northern Virginia Transition POINTS Guides

<https://thearcofnova.org/programs/transition/>

DARS Transition Services Guide

<https://www.vadars.org/downloads/publications/TransitionServicesGuide.pdf>

Employment Discussion Guide-Oregon:

<http://oregonisp.org/cdp/> (first link on the page)

Employment First:

<http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/EmploymentFirst.htm>

Guidance for the Development of Postsecondary Goals

[http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special\\_ed/transition\\_svcs/index.shtml](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/transition_svcs/index.shtml) (link to Word document is at bottom of page)

A Guide for Career Discovery: Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities

<http://dmh.mo.gov/ada/org/careerdiscoveryguide.pdf>

Helping Students Become Self Determined:

<http://www.imdetermined.org/>, see the *Toolbox for Self-Determination* on the Documents section of the Resources page

Helping Youth Develop Soft Skills for Job Success: Tips for Parents and Families:

[http://www.ncwd-youth.info/sites/default/files/infobrief\\_issue28\\_0.pdf](http://www.ncwd-youth.info/sites/default/files/infobrief_issue28_0.pdf)

A How-To-Guide to Community Employment for Job Seekers and Families:

<http://jobguide.ohioemploymentfirst.org/>

I Want to Work Workbook

[http://www.personcenteredpractices.org/work\\_workbook.html](http://www.personcenteredpractices.org/work_workbook.html)

Minnesota Disability Benefits 101- Informed Choice

[https://mn.db101.org/partners\\_2.htm](https://mn.db101.org/partners_2.htm)

National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center:

<http://www.nsttac.org/content/what-indicator-13>

Soft Skills to Pay the Bills:

<http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills/>

ThinkWork!

<http://www.thinkwork.org/rrtc/ktsf>

Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services PC ISP Training Packet:

<http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov/library/document-library/pc%20isp%20training%20packet%204-1-15%20final.pdf>