Recent research has shown that supported employment interventions for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) has a significant positive impact on the employment acquisition and sustainability for people with I/DD. However, even with evidence showing this effectiveness, national rates of integrated employment of people with I/DD are below one-third of the working-age population. With the passing of the 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), advancements and progress have been made in supported and customized employment, internship experiences, and higher education. But what more can be done in regards to policies and future research? How can competitive and integrated employment for people with I/DD be boosted higher? This article explores those questions.

**KEY FINDINGS:**

The article discusses four pathways to competitive and integrated employment (CIE) for people with I/DD: 1. supported employment (SE), 2. customized employment, 3. internships and 4. higher education.

Here are some of their findings:

- Implementation of supported employment, which is competitive employment in an integrated setting with ongoing support services for individuals with the most severe disabilities, includes four phases:
  - Get to know the job seeker
  - Job development and matching
  - Training and support
  - Job retention services

- When using supported employment, keep in mind the following issues:
  - Use SE for people who have the most significant disabilities
  - Employment specialists should be well-trained
  - Have a balanced job seeker/business interest focus
  - Avoid poor job matches
  - Factor in the funding required to keep a person in a certain job

- Customized employment is an important part of supported employment and includes discovery, development, job training and support.

- Internships and hands on experience is a vital part of future success and should be supported prior to exiting high school.

**PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE:**

- Transition-aged youth with ID have the lowest rates of post secondary enrollment of any disability group. Schools, state vocational rehabilitation agencies, community rehabilitation providers, and colleges and universities will need to collaborate to create new ways to better integrate students with I/DD.

- Stronger community rehabilitation programs will be needed with staff that have community employment experience with people with I/DD, understand that people with I/DD are employable and the importance of employment for all, be able to provide long term supports, and be experts at working with employers.

- The following is needed to better promote the importance of CIE for people with I/DD:
  - Providing training to create more competent employment specialists
  - Federally fund research that focuses on the issue of CIE
  - Have better school-community relationships
  - Provide transition and employment knowledge to family members
  - Having more inclusive social skills instruction through more integration
  - Before graduation, create a seamless transition to paid employment

**MORE ABOUT THIS ARTICLE:**

- 20-25 percent of the country’s persons with I/DD are working competitively; that percentage is above 50 percent in states including Vermont, Connecticut, Michigan, Oregon, Nebraska, Idaho, and Nevada.

- Supported employment was first defined in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which was replaced by the WIOA in 2014.

- Vocational rehabilitation funding can also be used to provide customized employment, yet very few state agencies have taken steps to incorporate it into their processes.

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