

“EMPLOYMENT FIRST” IN SOUTH CAROLINA

One of the greatest challenges faced by people with disabilities has been securing and maintaining meaningful employment. SCDDSN believes that most people who want a job should be able to have one and, regardless of his or her disability, can work if provided the necessary and appropriate supports.

The value of employment, especially for people with disabilities, is well documented.

- **Relationships.** Work is where people develop relationships, friendships, and acquaintances with other people.
- **Identity.** Much of who we are and how we are perceived by others is related to where we work and what we do at work.
- **Meaning.** Our society values work. By working, people with disabilities know they are engaged in meaningful activities, as do others with whom they come in contact.
- **Self Esteem.** Through work we often have a sense of accomplishment, increasing our sense of competence and self worth.
- **Economics.** Many people with disabilities live in or near poverty. Employment enables people to be equal participants at work and to contribute to the economic well being of their communities and their country.

For these reasons, SCDDSN embraces the principle of “employment first” as an approach to service delivery. As such, “employment first”:

- Assumes employment is the preferred day service option for adults with disabilities;
- Assumes people with disabilities require/want services/support to obtain and/or maintain employment;
- Promotes employment, rather than non-work service options, as the primary option for adults from the first contact and through all contacts,
- Arms staff with a thorough knowledge of employment services/ supports and of employment related issues/solutions,
- Ensures that the selection of non-work service options are made based on informed choice, after careful consideration and after attempts to remove barriers to employment have been unsuccessful,
- Responds quickly to those choosing employment, without extended waiting periods for service and without first being subjected to non-work options.
- Has in place well-qualified providers who can readily:
 - assess readiness and preferences,
 - match people to and place people in appropriate jobs selected from and array of possibilities,
 - provide on the job training/coaching, and
 - support people as needed to sustain employment.
- Actively seeks to identify and remove barriers or disincentives to employment as the preferred option.