

Choosing an Employment Provider

By: Pat Steele

An old saying that people talk a lot about the weather, but no one ever does anything about it, can also be applied to the concept of choice in employment services for people with disabilities. Although the concept of choice has been a dominant theme in services for years, little has been done to help consumers, well, be consumers.

As part of our Center's work on an employment project with Polk County Health Services, we put together a guide that consumers could use in selecting an employment provider. One section of the guide provides a series of questions that a consumer can use when they visit an employment organization. Though the guide is intended primarily for consumers, providers can benefit from it as well as they can use it to check their own quality of services.

The entire guide is available on our website at <http://disability.law.uiowa.edu/> Click on partners and then National Results Council.

Below is an excerpt from the guide for the consumer to use when visiting an organization.

Visiting the Organization

In deciding on which organization can best meet your employment needs it is important for you to visit organizations. Your impressions are important when you make your visit. Here are some things to look for:

- *Does the building appear to be well maintained, clean, and safe?*
- *Is the building accessible? Are there features like handrails, elevators, automatic doors and ramps for people who need them?*
- *Are there common restrooms and dining facilities for both consumers and staff members?*
- *Does the organization have a welcome letter or packet of information for potential new consumers?*

It is also important for you to ask questions to help you get the information you need to make good decisions. Here are some more questions that you may want to ask. You may think of other questions as well.

Programs and Support Services

- *Describe how your programs and services will help me?*
- *Please tell me how my opinions and desires will be included when planning for services.*
- *How will the services be individualized to meet my needs?*
- *What are the opportunities for my family to participate?*

Transportation

- *If I need transportation, how will you help me?*
- *What will be the cost for my transportation?*

Staff Members

- *How do staff members keep up with trends in the field?*
- *What specific training have staff members had on the Americans with Disabilities Act and other legislation such as the Work Incentives Improvement Act and Ticket to Work?*
- *Do staff members receive training on sales and marketing?*
- *If I do not get along with my job coach, what would we do about it?*
- *How many people with disabilities do you employ and what do they do?*

Accreditation

- *How long have you been accredited and what is the length of your current accreditation?*
- *According to the survey report what were the areas in which you needed to improve and how are you trying to do that?*
- *Could I see a copy of your latest survey report?*

Community Employment

- *How long have you been providing community employment services?*
- *Do most of the people who come to you for help in finding a job get placed?*
- *Can you describe a recent, typical job development process?*
- *If I need accommodations, how will they be provided?*
- *What happens if I lose my job?*
- *What will you do if I am unhappy about how long it is taking to get me a job?*
- *If I am on public benefits (e.g. Social Security, Medicaid) how can you help me manage the impact of wages on my benefits?*
- *Are you involved in community advocacy efforts?*

Types of Jobs

- *If I am not sure of what kind of job I want, how can you help me?*
- *If I start out working part time, but want more hours or a different job, how will you help me?*
- *What if I need to go to college or a training program to learn a new skill? How will you help me do this?*
- *What kind of job advancement or planning for the future do you do?*

Funding

- *Where do you get your funding? Are funding sources stable?*
- *Can you show me comments from funders expressing their satisfactions with your services?*

Outcomes

- *How do you use information about customer service satisfaction and outcomes?*
- *Please give me an example of when a customer was dissatisfied with your service and what you did about it.*

- *What makes you different from the other community employment service providers?*

Summary

The age of the consumer or customer has finally arrived in community employment services. You should look at the selection of an employment provider as you would any major purchase in your life- a car, a home, an appliance. The decision that you make will probably have a big impact on your life for many years to come.

Choosing the right provider for you will take time, but it is definitely worth the effort. Knowing your options will help you make informed choices about services so that you can work and live the way that you want.

It is unlikely that you will find a perfect organization, one that can meet all your expectations. However, with the use of this guide and help from family and friends, we hope that you can find the organization that best meets your needs.

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