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# Supporting Employment Choices: Lessons Learned - Part I

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little is known about the factors that influence employment-related choice-making for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

As a result, research staff from the Institute for Community Inclusion interviewed 16 individuals with IDD at four community rehabilitation providers (CRPs) throughout Massachusetts, along with their family members and employment professionals.

The goal was to understand what factors influenced employment choices, and how preferences compared with perceptions of the employment services and opportunities available.

The purpose of this article is to present the study's major findings and practical suggestions for employment professionals.

## Findings

Findings showed a collection of people and factors considered influential in employment-related decision-making for individuals with IDD. Family, school-based staff, the CRP, the job developer, and personal preferences each played a role at certain points in participants' lives and in the decisions they made.

### **The role of family in the formative years:**

- Family members served as role models for employment throughout the individual's childhood and adolescent years by instilling the belief that work was an expectation for adulthood.
- Participants reported that individuals were influenced by watching their siblings and parents go to work. They learned that work leads to independence and the means to support themselves and their families.

### **The role of school based staff and early employment experiences:**

- Teachers and other high-school staff provided the first exposure to work that often set the individual on a particular employment path.
- These early employment experiences shaped individuals' thoughts about employment, influencing preferences, career planning, and self-confidence related to work.

**The role of the CRP's culture:**

- The CRP's culture (comprised of its mix of services and philosophy about job readiness) affected the way staff perceives and offers employment options. Individuals were more likely to be working or actively considering employment when supported by a CRP with a strong focus on integrated employment.
- Staff from CRPs that offered a mix of services (community employment, sheltered workshops, enclaves etc) directed job development resources only to individuals who wanted to work in the community. There was no expectation for someone to leave the sheltered workshop. These staff also believed that individuals needed to meet prerequisites to be considered job-ready.
- On the contrary, staff from the CRP that provided only supports for community-based employment directed all resources to job development and job coaching. They held the belief that all people were ready to work.

**The role of the job developer:**

- The job developer emerged as the most influential person during the job search process, often directing decision-making about employment choices and sometimes persuading individuals to keep less satisfying jobs or remain at the workshop until the job developer could find better job matches.
- Individuals and family members often viewed their job developer as responsible for finding employment, and thus were only minimally engaged in the actual process of finding a job.

**The role of personal reasons for work:**

- Individuals' personal reasons for work also influenced employment-related decision-making.
- These personal reasons included earning money, productivity, the admiration of others, and the quality of social relationships.

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