



Employment Services and Support Programs Information

On May 26, 2020, Transition Tennessee hosted a virtual transition fair on Tennessee employment services and supports for individuals with disabilities. We heard from representatives from Project SEARCH, the American Job Center, TRC Smyrna, Evergreen Life Services, the Access Program, Benefits to Work, the Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Vocational Rehabilitation, TennCare, and Disability Pathfinder. This document summarizes information from each presentation.

Project SEARCH

Goal

- To prepare young people with significant disabilities for success in integrated, competitive employment

Program Description

- National program in 48 states
- This Transition-to-Work program is a business-led, one-year employment preparation program that takes place entirely at the workplace.
- The program is a combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands on training.
- No cost to families or students

Tennessee Statistics

- 17 program sites
- 534 people served since 2012

Employment Outcomes (2018-2019 Year)

- Average work hours per week was 25.49
- Average wage was \$9.28 an hour

School-Based and Adult Models

- School-Based: Student is still enrolled in school and is continuing to receive services on an IEP. These programs work closely with the school system and Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Adult: Student is 18+ and has exited the school system. These programs work closely with Vocational Rehabilitation.

Site Locations: School-Based

- BlueCross BlueShield- Chattanooga
- Embassy Suites- Murfreesboro and Nashville
- Le Bonheur Children's Hospital- Memphis
- Maryville College- Maryville



- Methodist North Hospital- Knoxville
- Parkwest Medical Center- Knoxville
- Sheraton Hotel- Memphis
- Tennova- Clarksville
- The Peabody- Memphis
- Welch College- Gallatin
- West TN Healthcare- Jackson
- Wilderness in the Smokies- Pigeon Forge

Site Locations: Adult Model

- Amerigroup- Nashville
- East TN Children's Hospital- Knoxville
- University of TN Medical Center- Knoxville
- Vanderbilt Children's Hospital- Nashville

General Project SEARCH Timeline

- Begins with a 3-week orientation
 - Includes onboarding, wayfinding, employability curriculum, communication skills, guest speakers, interviewing, and matching for 1st internship
- 3 internships that each last approximately 10 weeks
 - Includes intern employment planning meetings and employability curriculums
- Each internship is followed by a transition week to interview for the following placement.
- After completing the program, the goal is for the students to begin work at the host site or in their local community.
- Project SEARCH employment outcome criteria includes establishing competitive integrated employment, working a position year-round, working at least 16 hours each week, and securing a prevailing wage.

American Job Center

Description

- Designed to provide a full range of assistance to job seekers and employers
- Collaboration of private and public entities to help job seekers find work and employers find employees
- Provides customized recruitments and training programs aimed to close the skills gap
- Every county in Tennessee is served by an American Job Center.
- Can serve all individuals who are 16+
- These services are free.

Partners

- Adult Education, Postsecondary Vocational Education, Vocational Rehabilitation, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Pre-ETS Services, YouthCAN, WIOA Adult, Disabled Worker and Youth, State Unemployment Compensation, Job Corps, Higher Education, Social Security Administration (Employment and Training Programs), and more



Disability-Specific Information

- All AJC programs must ensure that individuals with disabilities have equal opportunity to access programs, benefits, and activities.
- Individuals with disabilities should be served through the same channels as individuals without disabilities.
- Disability disclosure is voluntary and confidential.
- Individuals may be eligible for services and supports in addition to typical AJC services.
- Staff cannot ask or share information about a disability.
- A reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment in how a program is administered that enables an individual with a disability to receive any aid, benefit, service, training, or employment equal to those provided to individuals without a disability
- All programs must provide reasonable accommodations to ensure equal access and opportunity.

Services Available on Site

- Interview skills, mock interviews, resume writing, financial education, and job search

Tennessee Rehabilitation Center (TRC) Smyrna

Description

- Training center that provides Vocational Rehabilitation services through a Career and Technical Education design
- Teaches individuals with disabilities the skills needed for employment and independent living
- 1 of 8 similar facilities in the nation
- Must be referred to the program through a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor
- Free program for students
- Provides on-campus housing

Potential Areas of Study

- Automotive Detailing Technician, Automotive Maintenance and Lubrication Technician, Business Education Technology, Certified Logistics Associate Technician, Certified Nurse's Assistant, Certified Production Technician, Customer Care, Food Service, Manufacturing/Assembly, Pharmacy Technician, and Power Equipment Technology

Disability Services

- Workplace accommodations
- Assistive technology
- Deaf, Deaf-Blind, and Hard of Hearing services
- Autism Spectrum Disorder services
- Vocational evaluation



Evergreen Life Services

Description

- Private provider serving individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- Locations in Memphis, Antioch, Chattanooga, Knoxville, and Greeneville

Services

- Employment (Exploration, Discovery, and Job Placement), Community Integration, Residential, Supported Living, and Family-Based Programs

Application Process

- Call for inquiry and step-by-step information
- Submit application on TennCare website
- Complete an assessment of eligibility
- Choose Evergreen as provider from list

Cost

- The assigned service level will determine funding eligibility.
- Can partner with Vocational Rehabilitation
- Private pay is an option and can be discussed on an individual basis.

Examples of Job Placements

- Ace Hardware, Publix, Subway, Holiday Inn, Hampton Inn, school systems, dentist offices, restaurants, and self-employment

Transportation

- ELS does provide transportation if needed.
- ELS connects clients with community transportation to increase independence.
- ELS encourages clients to use public transportation, Uber, and self-transportation.

The Access Program

Mission

- To work with people who have intellectual and developmental disabilities, their families, and supporting communities in order to live a productive lifestyle and to make independent living a reality

Services

- Aimed to identify and leverage strengths, skills, resources, and experiences to help individuals attain meaningful employment
- Employment assessment, job skills training, job search, and job placement
- On-the-job training
- Facilitated inclusion training for employers

GEODIS

- A company that works with Apple products and products associated with Apple
- The Access Program's Work Inclusion Network Program partners with GEODIS to offer a training program for people with disabilities.



- Works with trainees to develop strong materials handling skills
- Strives to create a positive work environment
- Supports different ideas and different backgrounds
- Maintains a work experience for employees built on respect and opportunity

GEODIS Values

- Commitment to clients, continuously innovative, build trust, demonstrate solidarities, and passion

Work Inclusion Network Program Goals

- Help trainees develop necessary job skills to succeed
- Familiarize trainees with the work environment
- Teach trainees company policies and procedures
- Provide confidence and ability for trainees to grow individually
- Prepare individuals to become GEODIS employees

Training Program Information

- Combination of classroom and transitional work group training
- 9-12 weeks training total
 - Week 1: classroom training daily
 - Week 2: specific task training and hands-on work at the warehouse; days are split between class and work
 - Weeks 3-9: working 8-hour shifts assigned to specific job tasks
 - This is a working job interview. Trainees are not guaranteed a position, but the goal is to be recommended for employment by GEODIS.
- Once trainee finishes training program, the trainee can be considered for employment at GEODIS.
- To participate in program, individuals must be Vocational Rehabilitation clients.

Benefits to Work

About

- Collaboration between the Tennessee Disability Coalition and Empower TN
- Nationally known as Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Programs
- Funding by the Social Security Administration (SSA)
- No cost to clients

Purpose

- To enhance awareness and understanding of the SSA's work incentives
- To provide an understanding of the impact of work on all benefits
- To assist individuals to make informed choices regarding work
- To promote employment and enhance economic self-sufficiency
- To encourage individuals considering employment but are hesitant due to an uncertainty of the impact of work on their benefits
- Benefits to Work encourages people to contact them for information and education about benefits.



Eligibility

- Be between 14 years old and retirement age
- Must already be receiving Social Security benefits based on disability
- Must be working, have a job offer, and/or committed to finding work

Benefits

- Social Security benefits are paid through Supplemental Security Income or Title II Disability Benefits
- Work and SSA Benefits are not mutually exclusive
- Can earn money and still keep cash benefits in almost all cases
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
 - Funded by federal tax dollars
 - Limits on earned income, unearned income, and resources
 - Comes with Medicaid (TennCare)
- Title II Disability- Sometimes called Supplemental Security Disability Income (SSDI) or just “Disability”
 - Entitlement program based upon insured status funded by Social Security Administration trust fund
 - Only limits on earned income
 - Comes with Medicare

Incentives

- Beneficiaries can earn money and earn cash benefits in almost all cases.
- Even if earned income causes loss of cash payments, Medicaid and/or Medicare coverage can be kept, sometimes indefinitely.
- Student Earned Income Exclusive: Can earn up to \$1,900 per month or \$7,670 per year without losing benefits

Council on Developmental Disabilities- Transportation

About

- State agency that connects citizens and government to improve the disability service system

Transportation Update

- Working to improve accessible transportation
- DIDD leading ride-share pilot program in Maury county by training the drivers to work with individuals with disabilities
- DIDD leading pilot program in Chattanooga with an app for public transportation that can be utilized by individuals with disabilities
- TCAD leading programs for older adults
- TennCare experimenting with Lyft partnership in Shelby County

Future Directions

- A new law (Public Chapter 600) created an Office of Accessible Transportation at the Tennessee Department of Transportation to provide a sustained focus on these issues from the state level.
- By March 2021, the new Office will:
 - Create a mission statement and plan



- Publish a report about accessible transportation in TN
- Work with an advisory group on all of the above

Disability Pathfinder

About

- A free, statewide information and referral system
- Includes information regarding employment, transportation, recreation, financial assistance, future planning, advocacy, and housing
- Contact staff via online form, phone, or email
- Their online service database is searchable by service type and county/region.

Q&A Session with DIDD, TennCare, and VR

We hosted a live Q&A session with DIDD, TennCare, and VR. Below we have summarized each agency's employment roles and their responses to each question.

Department of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (DIDD)

Employment Services Offered

- Exploration, Discovery, Job Development, Job Coaching, and Pre-Employment Services

TennCare

Employment and Community First CHOICES Program

- For people of all ages with an intellectual or developmental disability
- Services are designed to help people gain independence at home and in their community
- Learn work skills, find and keep a position, and advance in a career field
- Partnership with DIDD

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

Employment Services

- Provides services to individuals with disabilities to assist them in achieving their employment goals

Question 1: What is the first step in getting connected to your programs?

- **DIDD:** We have regional offices across the state. Each office has an intake division. The first step for us is to contact with our regional offices for an intake call. They have developed an understanding of all of the programs that are available and make referrals if necessary.
- **TennCare:** The DIDD can help people access the Employment and Community First CHOICES program because they are the intake entity. You can also start that process by submitting a self-referral online. We will send the referral to DIDD to start the intake process.
- **VR:** Referral is the first step. We can accept referrals from anyone: self, community, or other state agencies.



Question 2: Do VR, TennCare, and ECF all work together, or can you sign up for only one at a time?

- **TennCare:** We all work together. We are intentional to make sure that people can blend and braid different services in a way to most effectively meet their needs. There are collaboration agreements with all three organizations to really try to work together to make sure that we are maximizing the services that are available to people.

Question 3: Do you have any programs that work with high school students with disabilities to provide paid employment while they are still in high school?

- **VR:** The Pre-ETS program is available for students as young as 14 for job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, work-based readiness training, self-advocacy, counseling, and opportunities for transition and postsecondary programs. If the student expresses continued interests in competitive integrated employment, a Pre-ETS specialist will refer the student to apply for VR services. VR can accept referrals starting during a student's junior year of high school, so the student could receive full VR services before high school graduation. Occasionally, if that happens and services are agreed upon on an employment goal before high school graduation, VR can connect the student with employment during high school. It depends on the student's goal and what services are needed to meet that goal.
- **TennCare:** We serve people of all ages with intellectual and developmental disabilities. If a student qualifies for TennCare and the employment program, the student would be enrolled to receive services to meet their needs and goals. TennCare has priority enrollment groups, and one of those groups is transition-aged youth who are planning and preparing for employment. We really are trying to identify students who are still in school but are looking forward to employment either as part of their high school year or in preparation for adulthood. We want to work with them as early as we can to help with the transition from high school to employment as an adult.

Question 4: How do I find a job coach and when should we start that process?

- **DIDD:** It's never too early. People should begin thinking about what they want to do in their adulthood and what they want to do for employment during their school years. The time to start really getting serious about opportunities are really in those last couple of years of high school. The time to start finding a job coach is after you exit high school, connect with your local VR office, and are accepted into the ECF program.

Question 5: What financial assistance is available for these programs?

- **DIDD:** The funding that is available comes through waiver eligibility, and funding varies based on the service.
- **TennCare:** If you qualify for Medicaid programs, the services are available at no cost.



- **VR:** VR is an eligibility program, so some of the services are based on financial need. If an eligible client meets financial need, all the services required to train and secure for the specific vocational goal they have can be considered for placement on their individualized plan for employment. The VR counselor will explain the financial need process once the client is eligible for services.

Question 6: Due to COVID-19, how much impact is expected on the availability of jobs and access to programs in the near future?

- **DIDD:** It's going to be rough for our demographic in a lot of the same ways that it's rough for the general population right now. Unfortunately, in times of economic recession, our community gets hit first and often times the hardest. That said, one of the really encouraging things that has come from the last ten weeks or so has been an outpouring of employers contacting us and saying that "the person you're supporting has continued to come to work through this crisis." As workers have expressed concerns or fears about coming to work, workers with disabilities are equally represented through that spectrum of employees that have decided it's important for them to come to work and that it's important their businesses remain open. Hopefully that is indicative of our re-entry into the workforce once the economy reopens.
- **TennCare:** Regardless of the impact of COVID, it is not going to change our willingness and efforts for finding individuals with disabilities employment. It will continue to be a core focus of all three of our agencies, and we'll find ways to move beyond the COVID crisis and find ways to resume life as a new normal that continues to see individuals with disabilities as a valuable part of the workforce going forward.
- **VR:** These are such unique times that we are in right now, but it is a new normal, and we are using our creativity to find ways to continue connecting with businesses and partnerships and the community to best serve our clients.



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