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**GUIDANCE FOR EMPLOYMENT SERVICES, SETTINGS, AND UNEMPLOYMENT**

FROM: Duane Shumate, Director of Employment, Division of Developmental Disabilities 

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Guidance for Employment Services, Service Settings, and Unemployment

As a result of implementing guidance associated with COVID -19, many individuals and providers reside in communities which have issued "stay-at-home" orders, "social distancing", and/or implemented essential/non-essential employee(er) restrictions.

**The situation regarding COVID-19 is rapidly changing as is our knowledge of this new disease. This guidance is based on the best information currently available.**

**Flexibility in Delivery of Services:** Career Planning, Job Development, Prevocational, and Supported Employment service definitions provide flexibility in delivering services in circumstances when the staff may not be present with the individual. Providers are encouraged to use telehealth, virtual meetings, and remote supports while modifying activity to enable continuity of needed supports. Providers/staff should use non-public facing remote communication methods. Examples of non-public facing products include Apple FaceTime, Facebook Messenger video chat, Google Hangouts video, or Skype. It is important to note that Facebook Live, Twitch, TikTok, and similar video communication applications are public facing and should not be used in the provision of telehealth.

**Settings for Delivery of Services:** Settings for services may include the workplace, a licensed or certified day habilitation, one's residence, or the community. Services provided need to be aligned with assessed needs and outcomes as documented in the ISP.

**Recommended Strategies for Career Planning**

- **Discovery interviews:** A national best practice where the provider conducts interviews of the individual and those who know the individual. Exploratory questions focus on an individual's interests, hobbies, preferred activities, likes/dislikes, skills completed independently, and type of support needed in differing environments. The synthesis of this information helps establish vocational themes for further exploration. Discovery ideally would be completed in-person but could also be completed virtually through the remote communication options noted above.
- **Career Exploration:** For many individuals, there is limited exposure to the types of jobs, career pathways, and work settings available in one's community. Walking, driving, or virtually exploring one's community and the different vocational themes identified in the Discovery process helps individuals have a broader awareness of potential jobs, job tasks, and work settings.
- **Benefits education:** The myths about earned income and public benefits impact many individuals during Career planning. The use of [mo.db101.org](http://mo.db101.org) can support knowing the facts and how monthly income can be increased. Benefits estimate calculators and informational videos about the ability to work, work incentives, and the impact of earned income can be found at this website. In addition, for those professionals skilled in benefits education, the purposeful activities of benefits planning can be completed.

#### **Recommended Strategies for Prevocational**

- **Modeling of Skills:** The ability to systematically demonstrate tasks to be completed and skills to be acquired is an effective instructional model. The use of videos, apps, and virtual platforms can support interaction and instruction for an individual to continue these activities.
- **Instructional learning:** The ability to have direct conversation with an individual to discuss goals, activities, progress towards goals, and to develop skills is supported through the use of virtual/remote platforms when it best meets the individual's needs and learning styles.

#### **Recommended Strategies for Job Development**

Given the variability and individualized nature of desired job goals, in some instances it may still be fully appropriate to continue Job Development— especially if the individual is looking for a job in an industry that is deemed essential.

- This will vary from community to community based upon local “stay at home”, “social distancing”, and essential work status decisions. In many communities, grocery stores, hardware stores, hospitals, etc. continue to operate and are in need of a sustained workforce.
  - In these instances, if the individual desires to continue with their career pathway, this can be an opportunity to help supplement the community workforce in high demand positions.



- If an individual's job goal is a position which is deemed as non-essential in a community, there may still be activities which could be completed such as practicing interview skills, refining resumes, completing online applications, discussing potential employers, etc.

### **Recommended Strategies for Supported Employment**

In some instances, it may still be fully appropriate to continue supported employment, if the individual is working for a business that is deemed essential.

- If the individual is in an essential position, the nature of job coaching delivered should be aligned with the individual's assessed needs. If coaching is best delivered "in-person", this should continue depending upon the provider's policies.
  - If the individual is able to benefit from virtual/remote supports, the use of FaceTime, Messenger, Zoom, etc. is an allowable billable strategy. The use of technology and innovative strategies in virtual supports will continue to meet the instructional needs of the individual while also promoting greater integration into the workplace.
- If the individual is in a non-essential position and employment is interrupted (terminated, layoff, eliminated, etc.), the job coach could assist the individual with filing for unemployment insurance (if applicable).
  - The planning team should re-assess need and determine if another employment service is needed which would allow for continued career pathways (i.e. Career Planning, Job Development).

### **Unemployment Insurance**

Individuals with interrupted employment may be eligible for unemployment insurance. The Missouri Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DOLIR) is the state agency which processes unemployment insurance claims. DOLIR has developed a website specific to policies related to filing claims during the COVID 19 emergency. Information on filing a claim and frequently asked questions can be accessed at [labor.mo.gov/coronavirus](https://labor.mo.gov/coronavirus). Please note that claims are submitted online through [uinteract.labor.mo.gov](https://uinteract.labor.mo.gov).

Questions regarding this memorandum should be directed to Duane Shumate, Director of Employment at [duane.shumate@dmh.mo.gov](mailto:duane.shumate@dmh.mo.gov).