

Service Provider Promising Practice

YEAR OF PUBLICATION: 2020

**COVID-19
Resource**

TOPIC: Services and Service Innovation

TURN Community Services (Utah): Strategies for Remaining Employed or Returning to Work During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Background

TURN Community Services offers a range of supports, including employment and residential services, to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in Utah. In March 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Utah closed many nonessential businesses and encouraged its citizens to remain at home. TURN staff developed strategies to support individuals who received employment supports and remained on the job during Utah's *Stay At Home, Stay Safe* directive period and during the state's reopening phases.

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(state agency practices)

Implementation

TURN's staff implemented a range of strategies including supporting individuals to assess their own health risks. TURN engaged individuals in the process of informed choice regarding whether to remain on the job or return to work if their employer was open for business.

TURN's staff established a comprehensive protocol that surveyed individuals, their family members, and their residential providers to assess those who were at high risk for contracting COVID-19 or lived with people who were at risk. Staffers also contacted employers to see whether the business had remained open and whether an individual was considered an essential employee. Lastly, TURN staffers helped individuals to determine the financial impact of continuing to work or returning to work during COVID-19.

TURN also worked with individuals and employers to reduce the risk of working by ensuring individuals with IDD and TURN staff had access to personal protective equipment and were trained to use it effectively, following health department guidance. TURN supported individuals with temperature taking, hygiene, disinfecting, and social distancing. Job coaches used blue tape to mark 6 feet between people, and demonstrated that if an individual can stretch their arms out in front, behind, and to the side of them, and can touch a nearby person, then they are not six feet away and they need to move farther away to be safe.

TURN staff also helped individuals reduce their risk of COVID-19 while traveling to and from work. For example, staffers helped to negotiate new start and end times for the work day so that individuals who used public transportation would not have to use transit at peak commuting times. In circumstances where it was difficult to observe social distancing, such as on public transportation, staff provided transportation to and from work.

Finally, TURN staff helped individuals to use technology to remain connected to friends as well as to share their emotions related to COVID-19. This helped to reduce individuals' feelings of isolation. For example, residents in one TURN residence composed and performed a song called "Social Distance" that they recorded and posted to TURN's Facebook page.



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Impact

Supporting individuals to make an informed choice regarding working during the COVID-19 pandemic was a key strategy implemented by TURN. Through the support of TURN staff, individuals, families, and residential providers were given a venue to openly discuss the risk that working during COVID-19 presented to individuals and those they lived with. Additionally, TURN staff noted that efforts to support not only the physical but social and emotional health of the individuals they support helped to ensure that individuals had the tools they needed to be successful both in and out of the workplace.

Suggestions for Replication

- » Help individuals to gather information about their health risk factors and those of the people they live with. This empowers individuals to make safe and healthy decisions about maintaining their job or returning to work.
- » Advocate with employers for altered work hours, or changing individual shifts, so that employees can avoid crowded public transportation.
- » Support the development of coping skills so that individuals are better able to address their social and emotional needs.

For more information:

www.turncommunityservices.org/

www.facebook.com/TURNDreams/



This promising practice was developed in collaboration
with the State Employment Leadership Network

www.selnhub.org



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