

# Service Provider Promising Practice

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**COVID-19  
Resource**

TOPIC: Services and Service Innovation

## The Institute for Community Inclusion's Employment Services Team (Massachusetts): Leveraging Natural Supports for Essential Workers During COVID-19

### Background

The Institute for Community Inclusion's Employment Services Team (EST) provides direct employment supports to roughly 50 individuals throughout the metro Boston area. While the majority of these individuals became unemployed during the COVID-19 crisis, several who worked in essential positions were able to seamlessly remain employed. This was largely due to the EST's attention to establishing natural supports at the time of job placement. The EST's core strategy of cultivating of natural supports enabled staff to continue to easily provide any necessary supplemental support remotely.

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(state agency practices)

### Implementation

Regardless of each individual's level of support need or job placement, ETS staff believe that job coaches are not automatically necessary. ETS personnel immediately begin to assess the workplace for the identification of natural supports, even before the actual job placement, as a way to ensure long-term success for the individual. As these supports are identified, EST personnel begin coaching and training them to support their new co-worker. EST staff believe that this is an essential component of any placement.

EST staff describe their role in post-placement supports as being as minimal as possible, with an emphasis on teaching and training of others. No matter what the workplace supports entail, EST staff have the philosophy that whenever possible, supports should be provided by people at the workplace, rather than by the provider. By not relying on job coaching, EST staff are compelled to be creative from the beginning by engaging and building the investment of supervisors and co-workers to contribute to the individual's success.

In addition to natural supports, EST staff begin to identify where and when the individual can perform the job with as few supports as possible. They incorporate the use of technology such as smartphones or alarms, or other simple tools such as checklists, pictures, and videos, whenever possible to facilitate independence and supplement natural supports.

With fewer job coaching responsibilities during the pandemic, EST staff can focus on providing guidance and vocational counseling. Should there be areas in need of improvement or should an employee need retraining or support to learn a new skill, EST staff are available. Furthermore, this set-up allows staff to focus on opportunities for advancement for the individual in a way they might not have otherwise have been able to.



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## Impact

For all the employees placed through ICI's EST program, key supports were already in place to ensure success, as regular on-site job coaching had not been happening for months. At the time of COVID-19, EST staff were able to benefit from the energy they put into the development of natural supports throughout the course of the individual's placement at the job.

Individuals were able to continue working even if job coaches were not allowed on site. EST staff were able to focus specifically on supporting people to navigate changes such as new safety procedures related to personal protective equipment and social distancing. As a result, all individuals remained successfully employed with minimum interruption in their essential positions.

## Suggestions for replication

- » Identify and cultivate natural supports in the workplace at the time of job placement. This creates workplace investment in the individual's success.
- » Reframe the provider's role away from job coaching provided to the individual, and toward providing guidance and training to others at the workplace.

**For more information:**

[www.communityinclusion.org/employmentservices/](http://www.communityinclusion.org/employmentservices/)



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

[www.selnhub.org](http://www.selnhub.org)



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