

## Introducing Customized Employment

Customized employment is a flexible way to help people with any type of disability find meaningful work that matches their interests, skills, and conditions of employment, while also meeting the needs of an employer. There are three main phases to customized employment.

### Phase 1: Discovery

Discovery is a process of getting to know a job seeker by spending time learning about their interests, skills, and conditions of employment. The goal is to gather information, not assess or evaluate. There are three stages to Discovery. Let's look at how this could work for an example person, Jack.

- **Stage 1 – Who the Job Seeker is Now**

Discovery begins at home, with familiar people, and in familiar places. We want to get to know Jack where he is most comfortable, in his home and neighborhood. During a visit to the home, we hope to learn what is most important to Jack. We would ask questions such as “What is Jack good at?”, “How does Jack learn best?”, and “What is special about Jack?” After the home visit, we'll talk to his family, friends, and neighbors about what they see as his strengths, and we'll watch Jack doing things he enjoys.

- **Stage 2 – New People, New Opportunities**

We want to know what Jack knows how to do and how he learns new things. This will be done by supporting him in a variety of activities and trying new things. Activities will be based on Jack's interests and strengths and guided by Jack and his family. We also want to find people and businesses who share the same interests as Jack, learn from them, and get advice about working in that field. At the end of this stage, we will have helped Jack identify three vocational themes that will be a guide for customized job development.

- **Stage 3 – Career Narrative and Lists of 20**

After learning what Jack is good at, how he learns best, and about industries of interest, we summarize what we learned into a career narrative. We then meet with Jack's team – family, friends, support providers, etc. – to make the plan. We'll brainstorm a list of 20 businesses for each vocational theme and find out who on the team might have a connection to those businesses. The Lists of 20 become the starting point for customized job development.

## **Phase 2: Customized Job Development**

Customized job development follows Discovery. It focuses on creating employment opportunities instead of looking for job openings. We'll set up informational interviews with businesses on Jack's Lists of 20 and explore whether they have a need that Jack could fulfill; a win-win situation. In some instances, conversations with employers may also reveal opportunities for self-employment.

## **Phase 3: Employment Supports**

Once a job is negotiated, we'll consult with the employer and Jack to develop a plan for onboarding and training. We'll be there to support Jack and the employer as training begins, but the business serves as the primary trainer and support system. The best way to develop natural support in the workplace is to ensure Jack follows the same basic training process as any other employee and that he can establish and build relationships with coworkers from the start.