



Supported Employment During COVID-19: Resources for Virtual Employment Supports

May 15, 2020

While the pandemic and social distancing rules have made providing supported employment services more difficult for chapters of The Arc and other disability services agencies, there are a few resources and tools that are available to our chapters that will help to continue to provide some employment services remotely.

As a primer, we recommend [watching this free webinar published by APSE](#) which provides a primer on virtual services and an introduction to some of the tools we list in this document. If you would like further information, don't hesitate to reach out to Stephane Leblais, Senior Manager of Workforce Development and the Team Lead for The Arc@Work at leblais@thearc.org.

Federal & State Policy and Best Practices for Supported Employment During COVID-19

RSA's Q&A Guide on Administration of the VR Services, AIVRS, and Randolph-Sheppard Programs: This document provides guidance to state VR agencies on ways to continue to administer VR-funded services during the pandemic. This Q&A provides concrete definitions for the types of services that should/not be covered by VR, such as virtual and remote supports. Read the full Q&A document here:

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/rsa/supporting/rsa-faq-vr-aivrs-rs-programs-covid-19-05-14-2020.pdf>

WINTAC's VR 100 Series Webinar on Innovative Strategies from VR During the COVID-19 Pandemic: This webinar provides insight into how some VR agencies around the country have risen to the challenge of continuing to provide services and achieve positive employment outcomes during the pandemic. View the recording and download supporting materials by clicking the following link:

<http://www.wintac.org/whats-new/vr-100-series-webinar-innovative-strategies-vr-during-covid-19-pandemic>

State Employment Leadership Network Compilation of State Resources: This is a collection of guidance documents, best practices and FAQ pages that several states

have published to inform and assist disability services agencies during the pandemic. While not all states are represented in this collection, there is helpful information and testimonials from agencies around the country on how they providing continuity in services to their constituents. Visit the SELN COVID resource page for more information: <http://www.selnhub.org/COVID>

Resources by Category

Pre-ETS and Transition Support

TransitionTN Database: TransitionTN has developed a library of resources for pre-ETS services that is accessible on their website. The database is searchable and contains several great choices. Check it out: <https://transitiontn.org/vr/curriculum-database/>

T-folio: T-Folio is a free transition portfolio tool for high school age youth with disabilities. It is designed to guide youth in exploring, identifying, and planning for their desired post-school goals. Learn more here: <https://www.cctstfolio.com/>

ExploreWork: This is a future planning and career discovery tool for transition-age individuals with disabilities or for first-time job seekers. This service also includes work readiness training resources and self-advocacy trainings. Visit their website for more information: <https://explore-work.com/>

Job Readiness Training

SoftSkills to Pay the Bills: This free resource provided by the Department of Labor's Office on Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) provides a baseline of softskills training for job seekers, particularly those of transition age. Gain access to more information and downloadable tools and video trainings on ODEP's website. <https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/youth/softskills/>

Junior Achievement/Promising Tomorrows: Junior Achievement has made a number of work and career readiness trainings available online, free of charge. These trainings are offered at different levels for different learners, which will allow for each DSP or caregiver to choose the learning level that best suits the individual. Visit the website for more information and to gain access to the online trainings: <https://sites.google.com/ja.org/ja-ed-resources/home>

Daivergent: Daivergent provides individuals with paid remote work experience, video-based professional development courses, and socialization opportunities with their peers on the autism spectrum. Their platform also integrates into corporate neurodiversity programs, providing individuals an opportunity for full-time employment

within companies in their local communities. Visit their website for more information: <https://daivergent.com/work-readiness/>

Job/Career Exploration

O*Net: The O*NET Program is the nation's primary source of occupational information. Job developers and job coaches can use O*Net to help individuals with I/DD match their skills and interests to jobs based on job descriptions in O*Net's library. Visit O*Net to get started: <https://www.onetonline.org/>

Ohio Means Jobs Career Clusters Inventory: Similar to O*NET, the Ohio Means Jobs Career Clusters Inventory allows for job seekers to discover specific jobs and careers virtually. It offers an extensive professional goals and interests quiz for each new user, which allows the system to find career options that truly speak to each individual's preferences. Visit their website to get started: <https://jobseeker.k-12.ohiomeansjobs.monster.com/exploreit/defaultcci.aspx#/welcome>

Person Centered Practices' I Want to Work Workbook: This is a relatively low-fi resource that a job coach or DSP can use to help an individual identify career goals and prospective jobs together. We would recommend engaging with an individual over Zoom or another web conferencing platform that allows screensharing to be able to walk through each photo option together, as there are many to choose from. Access the workbook here: https://www.personcenteredpractices.org/pdfs/want_to_work_workbook.pdf

Virtual Job Shadow's Online Video Library: VirtualJobShadow.com empowers individuals to discover, plan and pursue their dreams with our unique video-based career planning platform. Inspire real-world career opportunities with over 1,000 professionally-produced job shadowing and career advice videos. Visit their website for more information: VirtualJobShadow.com

Truity Photo Career Quiz: This is a fun and easy-to-use tool to gauge professional interests and goals via photo selection. We would recommend engaging with an individual over Zoom or another web conferencing platform that allows screensharing to be able to walk through each photo option together, as there are many to choose from. Take the Truity Photo Career quiz here: <https://www.truity.com/test/photo-career-quiz>

The LEAD Center's Guided Group Discovery Resources: This website offers a number of great group supported employment resources, including a participant workbook and facilitator guide book. Download these resources on their website: <http://www.leadcenter.org/resources/tool-manual/guided-group-discovery-resources-introduction-and-course-participant-workbook-and-facilitator-guide>

CareerOneStop Career Videos: Similar to Virtual Job Shadow, this library of videos allows individuals to experience all kinds of jobs and careers virtually. Explore their

online video catalogue here:

<https://www.careeronestop.org/Videos/CareerVideos/career-videos.aspx>

On-the-job Virtual Supports

The Arc's Online Coaching Service: The Arc's Tech Programs launched The Online Coaching Service, which is a web-based platform that allows for DSPs to connect to individuals with disabilities via live video for training, case management, daily living support and other purposes. This service is offered by The Arc of the United States free of charge. Please contact Abe Rafi, Senior Director of Tech Programs at rafi@thearc.org to get more information.

LifeSherpa: Life Sherpa is a cloud-based, life and job skills training and management platform that helps disability services agencies provide support virtually to the individuals they serve. Complete with an embedded video calling platform, messaging system and robust analytics tool to measure the progress of each individual user, LifeSherpa promotes independence while also providing direct and easy access to their support network. Check out [this video](#) and their website: <https://lifesherpapp.com/>

Meminder: MeMinder is a talking pictures to-do list and video modeling tool for people who need help with reminders, sequencing and how to perform tasks at home, work, or school. Hundreds of tasks are preprogrammed with pictures and audio, making it simple to setup for the consumer. Get more information and download MeMinder on the Apple store or Google Play Store: <http://createabilityinc.com/vocational-assistance/>

Best Practices During the COVID-19 Pandemic

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many of our chapters have found it difficult to continue to provide supported employment services to their constituents. Yet, there are some agencies out there who, despite these trying times, have found a way to continue to provide services by thinking outside the box and leveraging available technologies to connect to the individuals they serve.

The Arc@Work put out a call to all chapters of The Arc who are continuing to provide supported employment services during this time to come forward and share their best practices with other chapters within our network. Below is a collection of promising practices that our chapters are using to continue to work with their job-seeking individuals.

Janet Cunningham, Nassau Works Consultant, The Arc Nassau (FL)

1. **Connect regularly with individuals** - We connect regularly at least weekly with each Supported Employment client via phone, text or zoom (when available). We

talk about their work (...) We also talk about what they are doing while quarantined such as things they are enjoying doing, practice working through chores, positive communication with those around us and self advocacy around their future with family friends and coworkers.

2. **Blend job development with safety training** – If they are looking for jobs, we talk about options of their safety, what kind of work they are able to do and what kind of work that is currently available. We assist them in filling out applications remotely by either coaching or do it virtually with them. We ensure they have an up to date resume. We assist them with the process of development, coach them about interviewing if they are called, responding to calls and self advocating for themselves in the process.
3. **Job coaching** - If necessary we will coach them on the job with proper protection (mask and social distancing) or through coaching with the employer and contacting the individual before or after work. Building natural supports in the work place is important so this is a really good time to do that. Contacting the employer/supervisor directly and providing guidance and instruction on how to communicate with them if necessary.
4. **Speak on importance of selfcare in and outside of the workplace** - Self care during this time is important so talking about washing our hands, hygiene, cleaning surfaces, being healthy, eating healthy, doing some exercise, getting some sunshine by opening up the blinds and if safe, windows.
5. **Offer hope where/when you can** - We encourage them by letting them know that we want to make sure that when jobs are available again that we are ready to go and find the jobs that they need. We also let them know that it may take a little time because a lot of people are off work but if 'you' are ready and willing you have a good chance.

Lauren Shubring, Assistant Director of County Programs, The Arc of Spokane (WA)

1. **Connect regularly with individuals and families (and get people from the community involved as well!)** - Our Employment & Community Inclusion staff have been doing regular video calls, phone calls, and emails with clients and also including family and others on their support teams. Some staff have set up Zoom video calls with the client and their coworkers so that they can continue to build personal connection. In our CI program, staff have identified the relationships that our clients have with people in the community and have helped coordinate writing letters to build those friendships.
2. **Creating a discovery binder** - This is an activity that our staff can be doing during down time. Creating customized packets of information and helpful strategies for clients - especially for clients who it has been harder to connect with on the phone, we can still fill out this information that can be saved and passed along to anyone who supports them.
3. **Card-based discovery activity** - This project is a binder with cards that can be physically moved from one ziplock bag to another. Staff printed several different categories of items using Discovery form prompts and "laminated" them with

packing tape. For example, the starting baggy has cards such as walking, playing with pets, sweeping, cooking. There are 2 other bags essentially labeled "Like" and "Dislike" where he can put those items in as he decides! This was an amazing effort to get a client to interact in employment that was not happy with the normal modes of communication we've used.

4. **Creating Social Stories** - creating stories the client can relate to that have tough situations occur. They can discuss what kind of actions/reactions were available, what the consequences of the response may have been, and what the client may have chosen and why.
5. **Creating virtual tours** - Our staff have set up virtual tours of places like aquariums, museums, Disney World, etc to do with clients! This would be a good time to do virtual job tours with employment clients to show them different work settings.
6. **Pre-ETS/Discovery** - Some clients who are still in school need more discovery so our staff have created a plan for the student to accomplish a task or several tasks in a row and have their parent or home care staff record them. The result being virtual, in home discovery, without adding more people to the environment. It could be washing dishes, drying them, and putting them away. Staff would video chat with the student, explain the process, perhaps demonstrate the act in his own kitchen via video, and then have the student try. This could all be live, or recorded, or done one step at a time before we put all the steps together. Staff will learn a lot about the student as they try this new skill, not just that they can clean a dish. How they take instruction, do they ask good questions, do they focus on the task, etc.

Adam Belmore, Director of Employment Services, Brockton Area Arc (MA)

1. **Connect regularly with individuals** - We have had much success with tele-programming. We use zoom, facebook messenger, facetime, google duo, emails, and phone calls as our main source of reaching out.
2. **Job Development** - We use resources that we already had developed to set up activities for job development. We use powerpoint presentations on different topics, reviewing/updating career portfolios for individuals, videos from a variety of sources, worksheets we find online or create, and any other resources we can find to help continue skill building. We have tossed around the idea of putting together a job development forum through a zoom meeting on a variety of topics, and inviting those from other programs to join (still in the works). We can still do job exploring activities including researching companies, career paths, types of jobs, skills required for certain fields, etc. This is all done online using the internet and sharing screens if possible. We have had conversations with people in the households to try and conduct discovery interviews for some of our newer participants.
3. **Group Supported Employment** - For our group supported program we are trying to create safety presentations for a variety of types of jobs for instance a warehouse safety presentation or a landscaping safety presentation. We are also creating safety rules and materials that we may implement when we are allowed

to return to our building. Going over that information now helps prep for when that day does come.

4. **Practice on using teleconferencing technology and internet safety tips** - We work a lot with people to try and understand how to use this technology better through phone calls while they are using technology to try to give directions, working to try different platforms for video chat. Learning these skills takes some practice and it is a good time to try that. We had one staff share some internet safety material that we will go over with people now that internet usage is way up.

Adam Kubler, Director of Project HIRE, The Arc of New Jersey (NJ)

1. **Prevocational training** - A focus on billable prevocational activities that can be delivered via phone, video call in a class type format. There are many free curricula available online that can guide staff on exploring work readiness, soft skills and interest/aptitude inventory. <http://www.wintac.org/> for example
2. **Case management** - Conduct annual reviews of all participant cases, goals, progress, update contact information and review agency policies (we have a participant handbook)
3. **Interview practice over Zoom, Google Hangouts or other approved platform.** Interviews can be with regularly assigned staff or with staff or administrative personnel to facilitate a more realistic interview environment.
4. **On-the-job tools/training** - Create tools that participants can use when they return to work. Examples, task lists, cheat cards, pictures, posters or items to be put on the wall in work spaces to remind participants of various procedures.
5. **Job development/discovery** - Seeking employment using online platforms, telephone, email or company site. Many employers are still working and seeking employees. Polish resume and create cover letters specific to each career area or employer instead of one general letter for all.