

Sheltered Workshops

Introduction

Once the vocational assessment process is complete, the student will be presented with a variety of training and work options, depending upon the results of the evaluation. Many options and directions are available. For students with more severe disabilities who could benefit from some work experience with a great deal of supervision the following option should be considered.

In sheltered employment options (sheltered workshops) individuals with disabilities work in a self-contained unit; they are not integrated with workers who do not have disabilities. Sheltered employment options typically range along a continuum from adult day programs to work activity centers to sheltered workshops. In adult day programs, individuals generally receive training in daily living skills, social skills, recreational skills, and prevocational skills. Work activity centers offer individuals similar training but may also include training in vocational skills. In sheltered workshops, individuals perform subcontracted tasks such as sewing, packaging, collating, or machine assembly and are usually paid on a piece-rate basis. Typically, people do not advance to the workshop until they have demonstrated certain mastery levels. Sheltered employment options are generally supported by federal and/or state funds and are operated by private, nonprofit corporations governed by a volunteer board of directors.

Traditionally, sheltered employment options were thought to be the only options available for individuals with severe disabilities. There is now evidence from supported employment models that individuals with severe disabilities can work in community settings if provided with adequate support. With the emergence of supported employment, many facilities began to modify their sheltered employment programs to provide workers with integrated options. Advocates of this trend away from sheltered employment point to the advantages of supported employment, which include higher wages, more meaningful work, and integration with workers who do not have disabilities.