

Values, Standards and Principles of Supported Employment



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Introduction

Supported Employment is a method of working with disabled people and other disadvantaged groups to access and maintain paid employment in the open labour market. This method of working is a proactive policy in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

This paper will define the differences with this methodology and other support mechanisms currently being used around Europe and will provide the position of the European Union of Supported Employment regarding the values, standards and process of Supported Employment.

Background

The concept, principles and values of Supported Employment are based on the early work from North America which demonstrated that people with significant learning disabilities could perform a variety of complex tasks, highlighting the potential and capabilities of people with learning disabilities to participate in paid work in the open labour market. Due to the success of Supported Employment assisting people with learning disabilities to access and maintain employment, the model was developed and expanded to include all areas of disability and disadvantage.

In the late 1980's, the model transferred across the Atlantic to Europe and a number of disability organisations in various European countries successfully piloted Supported Employment projects funded mainly under European Union programmes such as Helios and Horizon.

The European Union of Supported Employment (EUSE) was formed in 1993 and has developed its structure since that time. The definition of Supported Employment in Europe is recognised as:

"Providing support to people with disabilities or other disadvantaged groups to secure and maintain paid employment in the open labour market"

European Union of Supported Employment 2005.

The Issues

Supported Employment is completely consistent with the concepts of empowerment, social inclusion, dignity and respect for individuals. Within Europe, agreement has been reached on the values and principles that should be present at all Supported Employment stages and activities and adhere to full citizenship rights of individuals¹ :

Individuality – Supported Employment regards each individual as unique, with his / her own interests, preferences, conditions and life history

Respect – Supported Employment activities are always age appropriate, dignifying and enhancing

Self-determination – Supported Employment assists individuals to improve their interests and preferences, express their choices and define their employment / life plan according to personal and contextual conditions. It promotes the principles of self-advocacy by service users

Informed Choice – Supported Employment assists individuals to understand their opportunities fully so they can choose consistently within their preferences and with an understanding of the consequences of their choices

Empowerment – Supported Employment assists individuals to make decisions on their lifestyle and participation in society. Individuals are centrally involved in the planning, evaluation and development of services

Confidentiality – The Supported Employment service provider considers information given by individuals to them as confidential. The service user has access to his/her personal information gathered by the provider and any disclosure is at the discretion of and with the agreement of the individual

Flexibility – Staff and organisational structures are able to change according to the needs of service users. Services are flexible and responsive to the needs of individuals and can be adapted to meet specific requirements

Accessibility – Supported Employment services, facilities and information are fully accessible to all people with disabilities.

¹ European Union of Supported Employment – Information Booklet and Quality Standards (2005)

The values and principles of Supported Employment are supported by a 5-stage process/ methodology that has been identified and acknowledged as a European model of good practice which can be used as the framework within Supported Employment².

Engagement – Underpinned by the core values of accessibility to ensure informed choices are made

Vocational Profiling – Ensuring empowerment to the individual throughout the process

Job Finding – Self-determination and informed choice are key values in Supported Employment

Employer Engagement – Accessibility, flexibility and confidentiality are key values to be nurtured through this process

On/Off Job Support – Flexibility, confidentiality and respect are the key components to successful support measures. Support measures particularly refer to when the individual is in paid employment and are delivered through the provision of an Employment Support Worker/Job Coach

Position of the European Union of Supported Employment

The European Union of Supported Employment promotes the concept of Supported Employment as a vehicle/methodology to assist disabled and disadvantaged people access their right to work.

Whilst there are slight variations of the definition across the world, there remain three consistent elements that are fundamental to the European Supported Employment model:

1. **Paid Work** - Individuals should receive commensurate pay for work carried out – if a country operates a national minimum wage then the individual must be paid at least this rate or the going rate for the job
2. **Open Labour Market** – People with disabilities should be regular employees with the same wages, terms and conditions as other employees who are employed in businesses/ organisations within the public, private or voluntary sectors
3. **Ongoing Support** - This refers to job support in its widest concept whilst in paid employment. Support is individualised and is on a needs basis for both the employee and the employer

² European Union of Supported Employment – Information Booklet and Quality Standards (2005)

The European Union of Supported Employment promotes that professionals working in the area of Supported Employment should be able to demonstrate professional competence, knowledge and awareness of the values underpinning the process of Supported Employment.

Conclusion

Supported Employment is a method of intervention which assists individuals with disability or disadvantage to access paid jobs in the open labour market. The European Union of Supported Employment has clearly stated values and principles with ethical guidelines for professionals to ensure that the needs of the individual are paramount regarding all decisions in relation to the Supported Employment process.

Further Reading

- EUSE Position Paper "Client Engagement"
- EUSE Position Paper "Vocational Profiling"
- EUSE Position Paper "Job Finding"
- EUSE Position Paper "Working with Employers"
- EUSE Position Paper "On and Off Job Support"

This document is available in alternative formats such as Braille, Audiotape or Electronically on request.

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