

VR Progressive Employment Binder: Introduction and Overview

VocRehab Vermont believes in the value of Progressive Employment (PE) as a strategy to engage individuals with disabilities in work trials, build skills, enhance a resume, and explore career options. PE also provides employers with a method to evaluate potential employees in an informal, low risk way.

The key principles are:

- Everyone is ready for something
- Small success leads to further success
- Progressive Employment provides flexibility and creativity based on each person's or employer's situation
- It is low risk for both the employer and the participant
- Progressive Employment is an engagement strategy and eliminates the need to be "job ready"

Progressive employment *is*:

- A series of placement options geared to the skill level of the individual
- A method to evaluate existing work skills, reduce fear and identify training, support or accommodation needs
- A way to develop interpersonal and customer service skills
- An opportunity for individuals to explore possible careers in short-term placements
- A way to introduce a candidate to a prospective employer, especially for those individuals who struggle to get their foot in the door
- A tool to build a resume and professional references
- A list of potential placements:
 - *company tour*
 - *job shadow*
 - *short-term work experience*
 - *on-the-job training*
 - *temp-to-hire*
- Negotiated by employment staff directly with the employer, and the purpose of training and skills/experience expectations are outlined in writing for both the employer and the participant
- Provides a way for employment staff to "offer" a variety of options for an employer rather than "ask" for consideration of their customers for open positions
- A proven method to increase employers' understanding of disabilities

Progressive employment *is not*:

- A promise of employment
- Providing a wage unless the employer places the person on their payroll through an On-the-Job Training option (Training offsets may be provided to the participant to cover transportation, meals, childcare or other out-of-pocket costs)
- Long-term subsidized employment or "warehousing" – generally work placements don't last longer than 8 weeks
- A violation of the Fair Labor Standard Act because:
 - the training is similar to what would be given in a vocational school or academic educational instruction
 - the training is for the benefit of the trainees
 - the trainees do not displace regular employees but work under their close observation
 - the employer that provides the training derives no immediate advantage from the activities of the trainees, and on occasion the employer's operations may actually be impeded
 - the trainees are not necessarily entitled to a job at the conclusion of the training period

- the employer and the trainees understand that the trainees are not entitled to wages for the time spent in training
- Full time employment – generally the participant does not work in excess of 25 hours
- The only option – those who have skills and experience are placed directly into competitive employment whenever possible.

This binder provides instructions and forms to be used by counseling and employment staffs when using PE placements. A copy of each form is provided in the appropriate pocket and is to be copied for each use. Or multiple copies may be kept in each pocket to take when needed. Our hope is that this binder will make PE a seamless process for our customers and easy to use for employment and counseling staffs.

Thanks to Chelsea Maxson and Raye Mudgett of the St. Albans VR office and to the I Team for the work they did in preparing this useful tool.