

PROGRAM

Work in Progress: Employment and Community Life

MAY 15, 2025 | BEST WESTERN ROYAL PLAZA



A conference providing opportunities to learn about promising practices, strategies, and resources to support the expansion of employment opportunities and community life engagement for individuals served by the Department of Developmental Services in Massachusetts.

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MORNING: 8:30AM TO 12:00PM**8:30-9:30**

Registration/Continental Breakfast Lobby and Royal Ballroom
 Exhibits open Lobby Exhibit Area

9:30-10:30

WELCOME: Holly McCarthy, Director of Community Life Engagement, Department of Developmental Services Royal Ballroom
 OPENING REMARKS: Sarah Peterson, Commissioner, Department of Developmental Services Royal Ballroom
 KEYNOTE: Lisa Drennan, Merge Inclusion Consulting Royal Ballroom

10:30-10:45 Break**10:45-12:00 Concurrent Workshop Session 1**

Social Security Benefits and Work: What You Need to Know Princess
 Strategies for Creating Stronger Pathways to Employment in Community-Based Day Supports (CBDS) Duchess
 Using Career Planning and Discovery to Jump Start the Job Search Westborough
 Belonging is the New Inclusion Marlborough
 Effective Job Coaching from an Employer Perspective Southborough
 Strategies to Support and Bolster Career Coaches in the Pursuit of Competitive Integrated Employment Sterling

AFTERNOON: 12:00PM TO 4:00PM**12:00-1:15**

Lunch Royal Ballroom
 Speaker: Tony Sampson, Author and Self Advocate

1:15-1:30 Break**1:30-2:45 Concurrent Workshop Session 2**

Crafting Connections: Mastering the Art of Networking in the Digital Age Marlborough
 Pathways to College and Career: Inclusive Postsecondary Education in Massachusetts Westborough
 Bridging the Gap Between CBDS and Competitive Integrated Employment Sterling
 Beyond Traditional Resumes: Creative Strategies for Showcasing Job Seekers Southborough
 Technology First: Expanding the Use of Technology at Home, Work, and in the Community Princess
 Transportation Solutions for Community Engagement and Employment Duchess

2:45-3:00 Break**3:00-4:00 Concurrent Workshop Session 3**

Mass Ability: We Can Help Duchess
 Person-Centered Planning in CBDS and Employment Sterling
 Engaging with Businesses to Develop Great Job Matches Southborough
 Empowering Futures for Transition Age Youth: Using Best Practice to Develop Individualized Pathways to Employment. Westborough
 Do's and Don'ts of Unpaid Work Experiences as a Path to Successful Employment Marlborough
 Smart Solutions for Inclusion: Bridging Disability and Technology Princess

3:15 Exhibits Close

Session 1 | 10:45am-12:00pm**SOCIAL SECURITY BENEFITS AND WORK: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW PRINCESS***Brian Forsythe, Work Without Limits**Kathleen Kelly, Mass Ability*

Do you have questions about the impact of employment on Social Security benefits? This training will address some of the common myths around work and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), while providing an overview of work incentives that can help people who want to go to work.

STRATEGIES FOR CREATING STRONGER PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT IN COMMUNITY-BASED DAY SUPPORTS (CBDS)..... DUCHESS*Katie Terino, House of Possibilities*

Creating meaningful employment opportunities within Community-Based Day Supports (CBDS) programs requires intentional strategy, innovation, and collaboration. This interactive session will explore effective approaches to building stronger employment pathways in both urban and suburban settings. Drawing on real-world examples, participants will learn how to identify opportunities, build partnerships, and implement creative employment models. Attendees will leave with practical tools, fresh ideas, and actionable steps to enhance their own CBDS offerings and better support individuals in achieving their employment goals.

USING CAREER PLANNING AND DISCOVERY TO JUMP START THE JOB SEARCH WESTBOROUGH*Jill Eastman, Institute for Community inclusion**Beth Wike, Institute for Community Inclusion*

Any good job search begins by reflecting on past experiences, marketable skills, and work preferences. From there, you begin to update your resume and start exploring options. The process is the same for the people you support. Your assistance in helping them find a job should start by assessing their work goals, their current abilities, and their interests. This presentation will focus on how to implement person-centered career planning, identify personal and family networks, and develop vocational profiles. We will discuss how to use discovery techniques designed to learn more about the job seeker and to start planning for the job search process.

BELONGING IS THE NEW INCLUSION: PRACTICAL SUPPORT IN ACTION..... MARLBOROUGH*Lisa Drennan, Merge Inclusion Consulting*

Inclusion and friendship matter, but helping individuals build real connections can be challenging. This session offers practical strategies to foster belonging—being welcomed, supported, known, and accepted as valued members of our greater community. Through scenarios and role-playing, learn how to facilitate conversations, encourage participation, and overcome hurdles, empowering those you support to create meaningful relationships in inclusive environments.

EFFECTIVE JOB COACHING FROM AN EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE SOUTHBOROUGH*Elyse Forbush, Jewish Vocational Services*

You've learned about job coaching from a supervisor or trial and error, but have you ever heard from an employer's perspective on what makes an effective job coach? If not, don't miss this opportunity! Elyse Forbush hired 50 adults with disclosed disabilities in the Food Service Department at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital retaining half, making up 27% of her overall department. Elyse will explain how to build meaningful relationships between job coaches and front-line supervisors and how skill-based resumes can increase your client's chance of securing employment. Come prepared for a frank and practical discussion on how you can sharpen your job coaching practices and promote your client's success!

STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT AND BOLSTER CAREER COACHES IN THE PURSUIT OF COMPETITIVE INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENTSTERLING

Jeff Gentry, Jewish Vocational Services

Suzanne Henderson, Consultant and Disability Advocate

This session focuses on cultivating competent teams of employment professionals who are better prepared to effectively create and support a truly inclusive workforce. We know that the focus of Individual Supported Employment funding is connecting DDS funded career seekers to competitive employment. We realize that Community Based Day Programs should all offer a meaningful pathway to employment. While the “what” of employment services is crystal clear, we often do not provide clear and compelling training that shows our team “how” to implement best practices to support career seekers on their path to employment. In this session, Jeff Gentry will explore the tools he is using with his team—imperfectly but relentlessly—to train and support his coaches to provide excellent career coaching for career seekers with disabilities. Suzanne Henderson, a seasoned disability professional with expertise in adult learning, will share ideas for strengthening the impact of staff training, so that coaches could more confidently and competently implement knowledge gained through professional development—ultimately increasing successful employment outcomes for job seekers with disabilities.

Session 2 | 1:30–2:45pm

PATHWAYS TO COLLEGE AND CAREER: INCLUSIVE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION IN MASSACHUSETTS WESTBOROUGH

Rachel Estremera, Institute for Community Inclusion

Ashley Luce, Institute for Community Inclusion

Maria Paiewonsky, Institute for Community Inclusion

The Massachusetts Inclusive Postsecondary Education (MAIPSE) initiative, formerly known as MAICEI, has been providing students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) access to inclusive college experiences since 2007. Established through Massachusetts legislative funding, this dual enrollment initiative was designed to expand opportunities for students with IDD beyond segregated programs, supporting their pursuit of higher education, training, and paid work experiences.

This session will explore the current scope and impact of MAIPSE across the state, highlighting key program components such as person-centered planning, travel training, academic coursework, and work-based learning. Presenters will share current examples from the University of Massachusetts Boston’s Inclusive Education Initiative, illustrating how these activities align with student goals and promote meaningful postsecondary outcomes.

CRAFTING CONNECTIONS: MASTERING THE ART OF NETWORKING IN THE DIGITAL AGEMARLBOROUGH

Amanda Amaral, Northeast Employment Collaborative

Terry Holmgren, South Shore Collaborative on Employment

Rupali Potnis, Central MA Employment Collaborative

Christine Ventulett-Buckley, Western MA Employment Collaborative

Nicole Williams, Greater Boston Employment Collaborative

Come learn about the Regional Employment Collaboratives and the benefits of joining your local collaborative. Participants will also leave with essential networking tools and strategies for the digital age, focusing on relationship-building, developing new techniques, crafting impactful elevator pitches, and leveraging AI and digital platforms for network expansion. Through interactive exercises and real-time feedback, attendees will refine their skills and enhance their network across both traditional and online channels. Upon conclusion, they’ll be prepared to navigate networking opportunities confidently and build strong professional connections in an increasingly AI-driven landscape.

TECHNOLOGY FIRST: EXPANDING THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY AT HOME, WORK, AND IN THE COMMUNITY PRINCESS

Bridget Casey, Department of Developmental Services

This session will provide an overview of Supportive Technology under DDS, including Assistive Technology (AT) Assessments and Remote Supports and Monitoring (RSM) as well as the evolution of Massachusetts becoming a Technology First State. We will review some examples of AT used across various life domains to improve functional outcomes for individuals to live more independent and engaging lives. Included in this session will be the use of no-tech, low -tech, and high-tech options as well as some universal support options that can be implemented in individuals' lives.

TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND EMPLOYMENT DUCHESS

David Hoff, Institute for Community Inclusion

Lack of transportation often poses a major barrier to individuals finding employment and fully engaging in activities in the community. This session will take a look at the transportation challenge and how it can be addressed. Based on national best practices, topics will include a) reframing the transportation issue: what's the real issue and taking a different approach; b) understanding the full range of transportation options; c) partnering to expand transportation solutions; d) existing service strategies and applying them to transportation; and e) transportation solutions at the individual and systems levels. At the end of this session, attendees will have a variety of practical ideas to apply to the transportation challenge.

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN CBDS AND COMPETITIVE INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT STERLING

Lhea Destromp, DDS Regional Employment Services

Tina Macy, DDS Regional Employment Services

Regional Employment Services is a Competitive Integrated Employment support provider within the Central West Region of DDS. We will be sharing two tools (a customized CtLC activity sheet and our RES competitive employment screening form) and hosting an interactive activity to assist providers, family members, and individuals to identify intentional, successive next steps and objectives toward building the necessary skills and experiences within a person's local community to prepare them to become independent members of the workforce. We hope to prompt questions and ideas for person-centered career planning and pathways while incorporating the 4 E's: exploration, exposure, experience, and environment to deepen your community-based practice of skills and integration.

BEYOND TRADITIONAL RESUMES: CREATIVE STRATEGIES FOR SHOWCASING JOB SEEKERS SOUTHBOROUGH

Lara Enein, Institute for Community Inclusion

Have you noticed that a resume isn't always the best tool to highlight a job seeker's potential? In fact, traditional resumes can often leave employers with more questions and hesitations. What can an employment professional do instead? Join this session to:

- learn how to creatively represent job seekers with disabilities to employers
- discover how to leverage visual and video resumes to showcase positive work attributes effectively
- explore customized employment strategies that not only meet business needs but empower job seekers as well

Session 3 | 3:00–4:00pm**PERSON-CENTERED PLANNING IN CBDS AND EMPLOYMENT STERLING**

Kathryn Friel, Jewish Family & Children's Services

This session will highlight the use of person-centered planning in CBDS and employment supports. Using various strategies to empower program participants to learn about their skills and interests, this method gives the power to the individual to understand what options they have for growth in their lives and work as well as how to make effective plans to reach personal goals. Use of person-centered planning increases the individual's control of decisions that affect their lives and creates better outcomes in all support areas.

ENGAGING WITH BUSINESSES TO DEVELOP GREAT JOB MATCHES SOUTHBOROUGH*Adam Belmore, Brockton Arc**Alexis Manuel, Institute for Community Inclusion**Emily Shea, Grow Associates**Liz Taylor-Lindsay, Road to Responsibility*

Job development is never easy, and the first hurdle is getting your foot in the door. Join us for this panel discussion led by experienced employment professionals who have found some creative and interesting ways to get an employer's attention. You will hear about the strategies they have used to build networks, learn about business needs, and create good job matches that work for the employer and the job seeker.

MASS ABILITY: WE ARE HERE TO HELP! DUCHESS*Rachel Reyes, Mass Ability*

Join this session to learn about the services offered by Mass Ability and how they can be a resource for individuals who would like to go to work. Waiting for final text

SMART SOLUTIONS FOR INCLUSION: BRIDGING DISABILITY AND TECHNOLOGY PRINCESS*Jeanine Pavlack, NEBA**Jake Hammond, NEBA*

This session explores the cutting edge of assistive and adaptive technologies that empower individuals with disabilities to live more independently, access education and employment, and fully participate in society. The session will include case studies, user-centered design principles, and interactive demonstrations, highlighting how collaboration between technologists, caregivers, and disability advocates can lead to more inclusive innovation. Join us to discover how these technologies are not only enhancing functionality but also reshaping attitudes and breaking barriers.

Key Takeaways:

- Emerging trends in assistive tech and inclusive design
- Real-world applications and success stories
- Strategies for co-creating technology with users with disabilities
- Insights on policy, funding, and implementation

EMPOWERING FUTURES FOR TRANSITION AGE YOUTH: USING BEST PRACTICE TO DEVELOP INDIVIDUALIZED PATHWAYS TO EMPLOYMENT WESTBOROUGH*Jill Curry, Lincoln-Sudbury Regional High School**Ryan Claire Connors, Newton Public Schools*

Preparing students with disabilities for meaningful work experiences often requires intentional planning and strong collaboration between educators, families, and community partners. This interactive session will explore best practices in career development, including person-centered planning and community-based work experiences. Participants will learn how to develop individualized pathways that align with students' strengths, interests, and goals, while addressing potential barriers when exploring work opportunities. This session offers practical tools and real-world examples to create pathways to employment as well as strategies to prepare students and their families for the transition into adulthood.

DO'S AND DON'TS OF UNPAID WORK EXPERIENCES AS A PATH TO SUCCESSFUL EMPLOYMENT.....MARLBOROUGH*David Hoff, Institute for Community inclusion*

Various experiences in the community are used as a part of efforts to explore possible job and career opportunities. This can include volunteer work, internships, and unpaid work experiences. While these can be important tools for job exploration, there are very specific wage and hour laws that must be followed. This is critical not only to ensure the rights of job seekers with disabilities are respected, but to also avoid possible liability for back wages by service providers and businesses. Join us for this session where we will take a close look at these tools; discuss the difference between volunteer work, internships, and unpaid work experiences; and discuss the specific rules for each, their appropriate role, and how they can be effectively used to advance competitive integrated employment.

EXHIBITORS

- Easter Seals
- Federation for Children with Special Needs
- Institute for Community Inclusion
- Mass Ability
- Mass Advocates Standing Strong
- Massachusetts APSE
- Massachusetts Center for Inclusive Higher Education
- Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services
- Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council
- Massachusetts Down Syndrome Congress
- Regional Employment Collaboratives
- The Arc of Massachusetts
- Work Without Limits

Looking for information and resources you can use to promote inclusion employment opportunities?

Check out www.EmploymentFirstMA.org

You will find the most up to date information on training opportunities. Tools and resources on everything from CBDS program development to transportation are easily accessible in the EmploymentFirstMA Resource Library.



This conference is presented by the Institute for Community Inclusion in partnership with the Department of Developmental Services.

UMass Boston



www.employmentfirstma.org

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ROYAL PLAZA HOTEL CONFERENCE FLOOR PLAN

