

Resources for youth with disabilities who want to work

Young people routinely get advice from parents, teachers, counselors and others about preparing for employment. Youth with disabilities often need a wider range of supports and services, including benefits counseling, vocational rehabilitation, assistive technology and personal assistance services. Here are some tips on services that can help.

High School

Preparations for school-to-work transition begin in high school. Schools are required by federal law have transition goals and services in place for students with disabilities by age 16, or earlier if determined appropriate by an IEP team. These goals and services help students plan for a successful life after high school.

Many schools offer transition classes for special education students, to help them prepare for independent living, including employment. Some schools have job experience programs or internships to help prepare for employment. Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS) provides vocational rehabilitation counseling in high schools across the state for students with disabilities, beginning as early as age 14.

Social Security and SSI Disability Benefits

Disability benefits are a key issue. Many families worry that employment will jeopardize their child's SSI or Social Security cash benefits, and Medicaid or Medicare health coverage. However, Congress has made many changes that enable individuals to work without losing vital benefits.

SSI has a number of provisions which can help individuals either work part-time to supplement their benefits, or work full-time. For example, students under age 22 can earn over \$6,000 in 2009 and still receive their full SSI check each month. Another provision enables SSI beneficiaries to set aside money for a work-related goal, such as education, without exceeding the normal income and asset limits. SSI has a provision that allows individuals who work full-time to keep their Medicaid coverage, even if they earn too much to receive an SSI check.

Some young adults qualify for **Social Security Disability Insurance**, based on the work record of a retired, disabled or deceased parent. Social Security also has provisions for part-time work. In addition, both SSI and Social Security allow individuals to work full-time and keep Medicaid and/or Medicare health coverage after their cash benefits stop.

Project AWIN, the Arkansas Work Incentives Network, provides free counseling for SSI and Social Security beneficiaries who are interested in working. Counseling can help you maximize your income and avoid problems with your benefits. Call the Employment Sources Hotline, 1-866-283-7900.

The new **Ticket To Work** program helps disability beneficiaries get extra help finding a job, and protects them from some Social Security disability reviews while working. Individuals with disabilities are strongly encouraged to seek counseling about disability benefits and work incentives before they start work.

Paying for College or Technical School

In addition to the normal sources of scholarships and grants for education, students with disabilities have some additional resources available. Arkansas Rehabilitation Services can assist individuals with disabilities with paying for education or training that helps them prepare for employment. Arkansas Workforce Centers can also help with training costs for individuals in priority groups, which include youth and SSI recipients. SSI recipients also have several helpful work incentives that allow students to earn money and save for education and training, without losing their SSI benefits.

Help finding a job and getting job training

Arkansas Workforce Centers provide a range of job-related services, such as job listings, help preparing a resume, etc. Arkansas Rehabilitation Services counselors also help with job placement. ARS can also pay for supported employment services (see below) for individuals with severe disabilities, such as developmental disabilities, mental illnesses, traumatic brain injuries, etc.

Supported Employment

Individuals with severe disabilities may benefit from a service called supported employment, available through Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (ARS). Supported employment programs help individuals get a job that matches their interests and abilities, and provide job coaching to supplement the employer's training and supervision.

Medicaid Personal Care and Attendant Care

Some individuals rely on Medicaid services to help them with activities of daily living. Recent changes allow Medicaid attendants to help with personal care tasks in the workplace, as well as help with dressing for work and transporting to work.

Assistive Technology

Assistive technology refers to a range of devices and software to help overcome physical and sensory limitations. Help is often available through Arkansas Rehabilitation Services and Medicaid to pay for vehicle modifications, mobility devices, communications devices, etc.

For more information

For information about services and benefits for youth with disabilities, call the Employment Sources Hotline, a nonprofit service, at (866) 283-7900. It's free and confidential.

Suggestions?

If you would like to recommend other resources or services for youth with disabilities, please contact Scott Holladay, scott.holladay@arkansas.gov, or call 501-682-8510.