



Five Terms To Know About Supported Employment

There are many resources and services available when individuals with disabilities enter the world of work. These services are often referred to as Supported Employment Services and are provided through a government agency.

Here is a list of “terms to know” and resources to help you get started.

1. What is DARS?

The Department of Aging and Rehabilitative Services (**DARS**) is the state agency that provides Supported Employment Services and helps people with disabilities to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment. Sometimes our students begin working with **DARS** while they are in high school and receive Pre-Employment Transition Services (**Pre-ETS**). After they graduate, students may qualify for Vocational Rehabilitation Services (**VR**) and will work with an adult case manager to develop an Individual Plan for Employment (**IPE**). Sometimes the services include vocational assessments, driving assessments, or independent living assessments. Sometimes **DARS** will provide services through a vendor or Employment Services Organization (**ESO**). For more information on **DARS** and services they provide, visit their website at:

<https://www.vadars.org/drs/>.

2. What is an Employment Specialist?

An Employment Specialist, or job coach, is a person who works directly with a client with disabilities while they are seeking and becoming established in employment. Some Employment Specialists work directly for **DARS**. Often, Employment Specialists work for Employment Service Organizations (**ESOs**) – a private organization that works as a vendor for **DARS**. The Employment Specialist works directly with a client to identify prospective employers and to support clients during hiring and onboarding. Employment Specialists continue to work with clients until they are stable on the job.

3. What is a WISA?

A Work Incentives Special Advocate (**WISA**) works with **DARS** clients and their families to guide them through the process of juggling their income and their benefit reporting requirements. We know that a person will always have a larger income when working than when not working. A **WISA** can help clients understand how to handle their benefits with their newfound income. Ask your **DARS** counselor about whether or not working with a **WISA** would be an appropriate part of your Individual Plan for Employment (**IFE**) and learn more about Work Incentives on the [Social Security Administration's website](#).

4. What is customized employment?

Customized Employment is a process that creates a specific job for a candidate by matching the candidate's strengths and the employer's needs. An Employment Specialist helps shape a position with the employer rather than supporting a client through a traditional recruitment process. [Learn more about Customized Employment](#) and [read success stories](#) about how customized employment can work.

5. What are long-term follow along services?

After an employee is stable at a job, **DARS** will close that person's case. If changes occur at the job, the employee should not hesitate to reach out to their case manager to reopen the case. In the meantime, if a client has worked with an Employment Specialist through an Employment Services Organization, that Employment Specialist will usually touch base at least once per month as a part of **long-term follow along services** to see how the client is doing. This provides the client with an on-going support in case there are small issues to resolve along the way. Not all **DARS** clients qualify for **long-term follow along services**, so be sure to ask your **DARS** case manager about them.