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Special needs require special attorneys.

Transition & Supported Employment Working for You

Transition is a term used to describe post high school education planning processes for students with special needs between the ages of 14 and 22. Specifically, it is used to help students move from school to work, or secondary education. As these students get closer to the time of transition (the process of moving from a familiar system to one that is unknown) it often leaves them and their families anxious and uncertain about the future. If you take some time to develop a comprehensive plan during this period, you can be assured that the move to adult services will be less stressful and may even be full of pleasant surprises.

During the transition process you may begin to hear some different terms that you might not be used to. Supported Employment, IEP (Individual Education Plan), IPE (Individual Plan for Employment), VR (Vocational Rehabilitation), and a variety of acronyms that may be intimidating at first, but once you become more familiar with the transition process, will become second nature.

As mentioned above, the process of transition under federal guidelines starts at age 14 and continues to age 22. During the ages of 14-17 the focus begins with on campus planning activities. Between the ages of 18-22 students will begin to experience more real work activities, which often take place at offsite locations throughout their community. Have you ever thought about your young adult living on their own, getting a job, or moving on to higher education? Many parents confirm that these accomplishments can indeed become a reality for young people with disabilities. Some adapt more quickly than others, so it is important to start planning sooner rather than later. Supported Employment for individuals with disabilities is the focus of the rest of this article.

One of the most important tools utilized in transition is Supported Employment. This service will help your son or daughter gain and maintain employment with the help of a professional, called an employment consultant and/or job coach. These professionals are tasked with seeking employment opportunities with help from you and your son or daughter. This includes looking for leads, prepping individuals for interviews, helping with resume writing, and arranging for transportation to and from interviews and appointments, as needed. They are responsible for helping to protect the rights of your son or daughter during the job search process. They also assure that these young adults are treated fairly on the job at all times. Job coaches will actually go to the job site with your son or daughter to help ensure they receive proper training in a style that fits their individual needs. If your son or daughter is involved in an employment program, they might be able to receive job coaching services for an extended period of time.

The philosophy of supported employment is deeply rooted in the idea that everyone has a right to work. It also means that individuals should have the opportunity to experience competitive paid employment in a non-segregated environment. It is the goal of supported employment to help continue the process of integration, and foster the mainstreaming ideology that your son or daughter experienced in school. It is believed that if persons with disabilities receive equal treatment while on the job, they can also be equal partners in society. The self esteem and pride experienced through gaining employment instills a sense of pride and accomplishment from which everyone benefits.

Typically, supported employment is funded through the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS), which includes discovery, job development, job acquisition, stabilization, and transition to supported employment. The Work Incentive Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program through the Mississippi Partners for Informed Choice (M-PIC) section of MDRS can assist persons who have Social Security Disability or SSI benefits with work decisions.

For information and planning that will help secure the future for your special needs child or family member, call us today at 601-987-3000 or toll-free at 866-ELDERLAW (353-3752).