



# **I/DD Rather Be Working:**

A Roadmap to Understanding  
How You Can Work with Your Disability





*Empowered. Informed. Included.*

## **Our Mission**

The Arc of Texas promotes, protects, and advocates for the human rights and self-determination of Texans with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

## **Our Vision**

The Arc of Texas envisions a world where Texans with intellectual and developmental disabilities are included in their communities where quality supports and services are available to meet their needs and choices.

## **Our Impact**

The quality of life of Texans with intellectual and developmental disabilities will improve through The Arc of Texas' work to protect and enhance benefits and policies. We will do this by being a leader in public policy advocacy, by strengthening and developing targeted best practice programs, and by educating and training a network of grassroots advocates and allies.



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This guide continues our mission, promoting your rights and self-determination. Everyone wants to participate in their community, and if you want to do that through employment, we want to give you the tools to reach that goal.

This employment guide is your road map, or GPS, to preparing for getting a job, working with disability benefits like Medicaid and Social Security, and getting employment services.

Employment is within your reach, and this guide is the first step to achieving it!

Words in **bold blue** are explained in the back.

# Table of Contents

Rules of the Road.....	5
Traffic Report.....	6
Roadblocks.....	8-9
Transition.....	11-13
Navigating Benefits.....	14-17
Support Services.....	18-22
Roadside Assistance.....	23
Getting Your License (Success Stories).....	24-26
Driver’s Manual.....	27-28
FAQ’S.....	29



# Rules of the Road: You Have Rights

Before we hit the road towards employment, it is important to know your rights and benefits under federal and state laws and policies that address working with a disability.

## Employment First

This is a policy adopted by Texas and states that competitive and integrated employment must be the first and preferred option and goal of every Texan with a disability receiving public benefits. In other words, if someone with a disability wants to work, employment with various supports should be offered before unemployment, sheltered work, or day habilitation.

## The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

This is a law that protects a person with disabilities in many different ways. Specifically for employment, the ADA makes it illegal to deny an employment opportunity to someone based on their disability. It also protects people when they advocate for their rights, which include:

- Reasonable accommodations
- Confidentiality of records

## Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

This is a law that supports the implementation of programs and systems, like summer work programs, which introduce students with disabilities to different competitive work experiences. The law addresses **transition** needs for young adults, benefits and career counseling, applying to the Texas Workforce Commission, **vocational rehabilitation**, and other requirements.

## The Rehabilitation Act of 1973

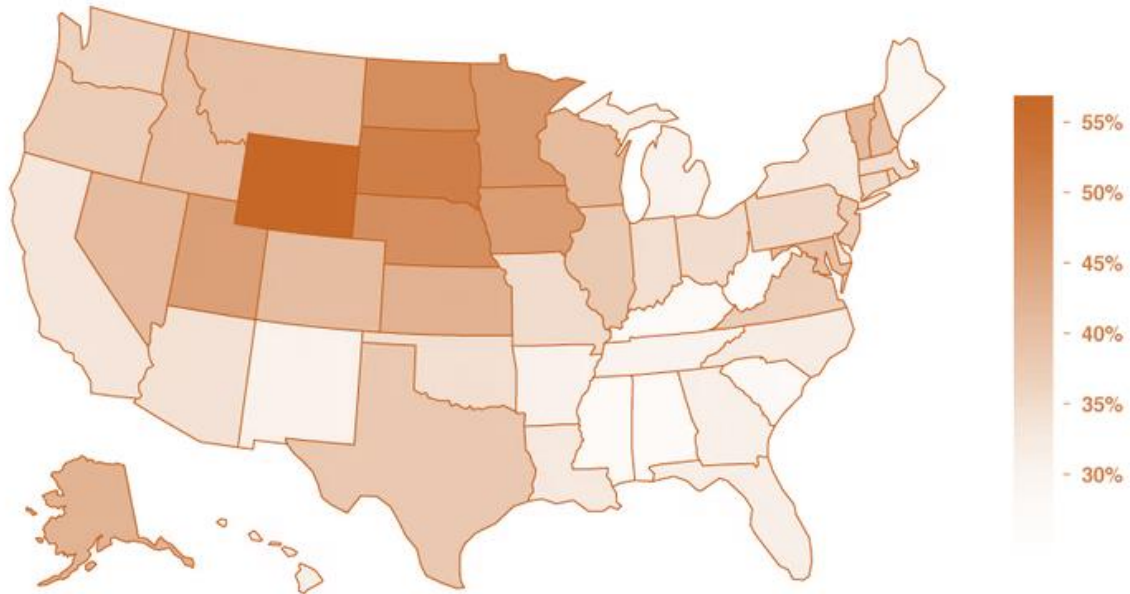
This law, similar to the ADA, makes it illegal to discriminate based on disability. Under this law, employers receiving federal funding cannot discriminate against qualified people with disabilities. In other words, if a person meets the job's requirements, they must be given equal opportunity to be hired.

## Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services are available to those students.

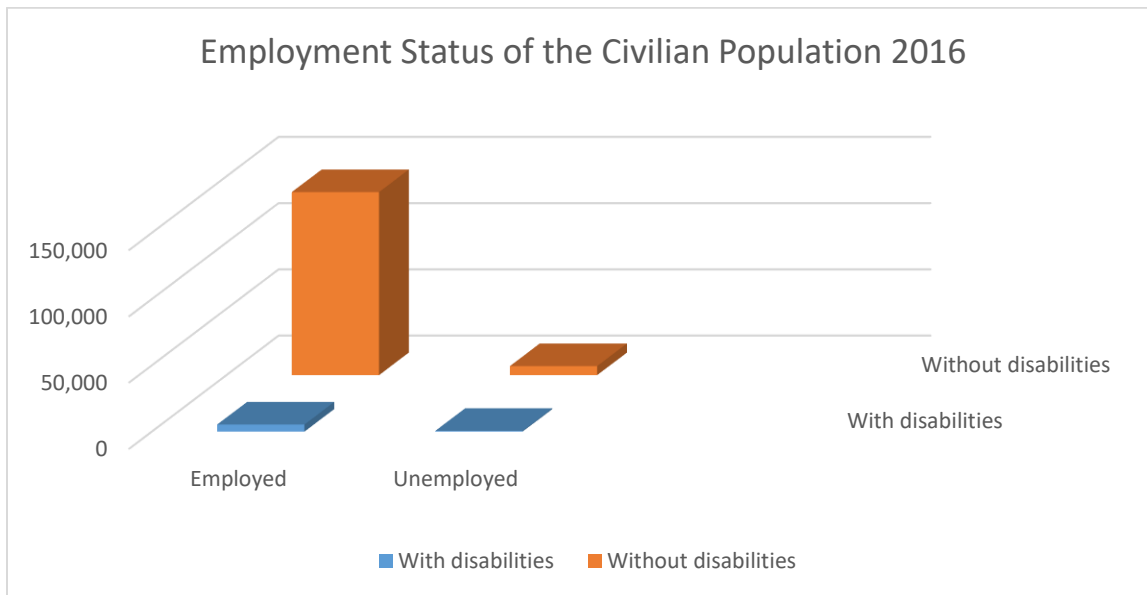
# Traffic Report: Employment Statistics

## EMPLOYMENT RATE FOR WORKERS WITH DISABILITIES

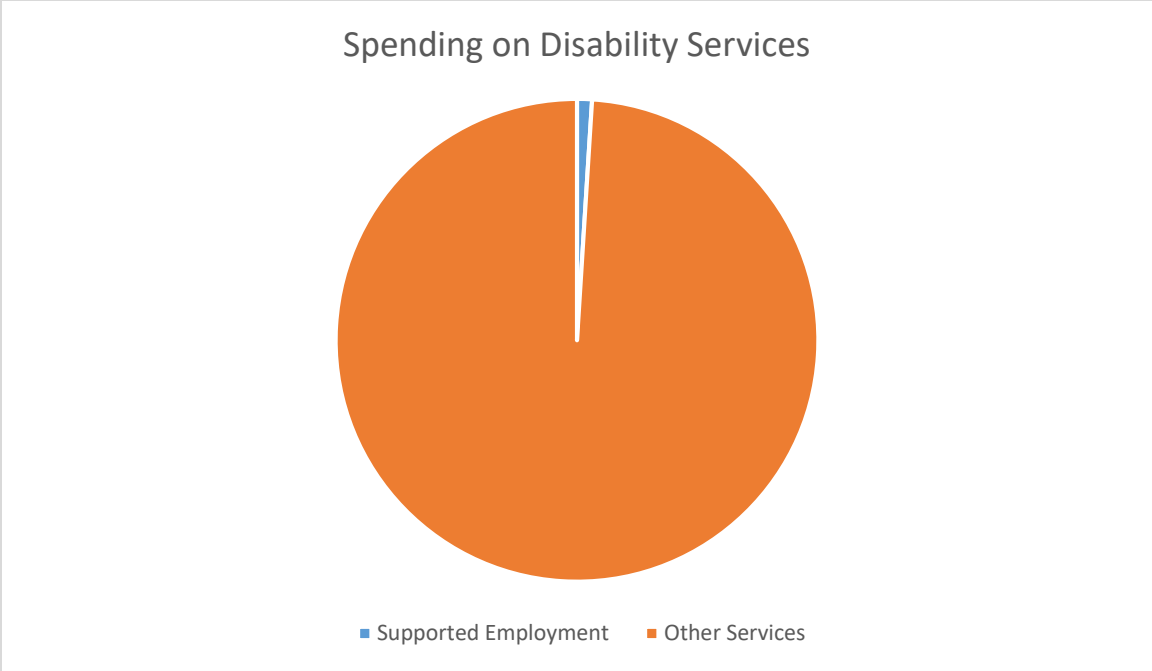


Fortune

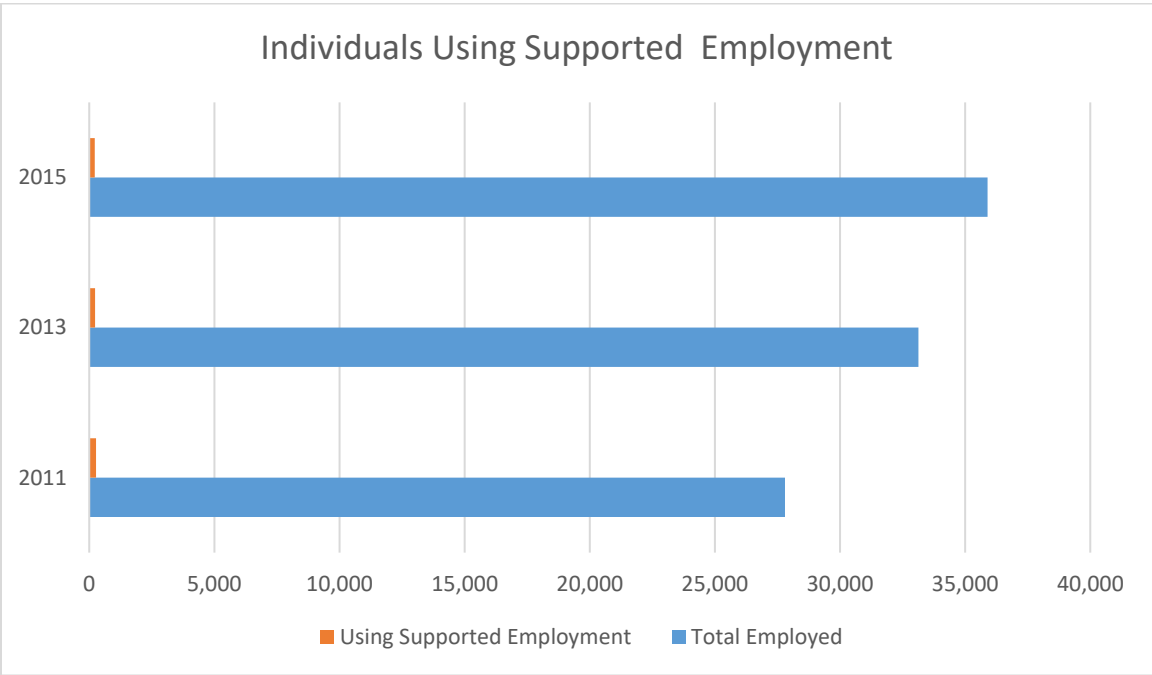
People with intellectual and developmental disabilities work even less.



Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017



\*Services include day hab, home supports, therapies, institution-based services, and others.



The State of the States, 2017

\*This graph depicts the number of people with disabilities who could be using supported employment as a service, but aren't for various and unidentified reasons.

# Roadblocks

Before you start navigating employment, it is important to know what may stand in your way. Knowing what is coming will help you find routes around these roadblocks.

**If you get frustrated, you are not alone! The Arc of Texas is here to help you navigate your road to employment.**

**Benefits** are a big concern for those with IDD who want to work. There are many misconceptions around working with **SSI**, **SSDI**, and **Medicaid**. Do not let benefits keep you from working. There are many ways you can work and keep your important services.

**Navigating the system** can seem overwhelming because it is complicated. It is easy to get lost going back and forth between the Texas Workforce Commission, Health and Human Services Commission, waiver services (if you have them), and local authorities and providers. Later, you'll see some helpful graphs that explain how the system works.



**Applying for a job** can be a roadblock people forget about. With online job applications becoming more and more popular, people without internet or computers can feel like they are missing opportunities. Many employers will still give out paper applications if you ask for them. There are services that can help you fill out job applications if you need it.

**Transportation** is reported to be the most common barrier people with IDD face. The bus routes in Texas, particularly ones in rural areas, limit and restrict where people are free to work. Disability specific transport services can be a challenge to use.



# Directions

Throughout this next section, you will navigate the steps of getting a job when you have IDD.

Once you have read through this section, don't hesitate to contact the organizations and agencies described as ***“Roadside Assistance”***. You have the power and ability to tackle and achieve your employment goals, and we're here to support you.



# Transition

Turn Right at age 14



## Transition

In Texas, transition begins at age fourteen (14), or in the student's Freshman year of high school. Starting young will give you a lot of time to explore, build necessary skills, and connect with services. Always have a goal to get a job. Start by putting it on your **Individual Education Plan (IEP)**. Creating an employment goal for your very first IEP will help you stay the course, even when road bumps get in the way. It's never too young to have a goal to work in the community.

Encourage self-determination and person-centered thinking by making sure you (the student) attend every **Admission, Review, and Discharge (ARD)** meeting. It is important for you to voice your interests and talk about your skills.

Summer work programs are a great tool for transition-age students. They allow students with disabilities to explore different job opportunities and build their resume.

**Roadside Assistance:** SPEDTEX: <http://www.spedtex.org/contact/> or call 1-855-773-3839.



## Transition Can Help You Own Your Own Business.

James Parker is the successful owner of his Houston-based shredding business, Shredding On the Go. His success began early, in school, with a collaborative effort between James, his family, his teachers, state agencies and his therapists. When everyone asked what James could possibly do for his career, his family remembered how James loved to shred papers when he was younger. Shredding, and finding the shredder that best fit James' abilities became the goal of his Person Centered Plan (PCP) and IEP. By the time James left high school, he had the skills he needed to start his shredding business. But, even if owning a business isn't for you, identifying your goals and being active in your own transition can open so many doors to different employment options.



# Navigating Benefits

Merge on Benefits Blvd  
and Employment Ave.



## Working with Benefits

Working and being on disability benefits like Social Security Insurance (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), and Medicaid is complicated, but not impossible. Contact a benefits counselor at Texas Workforce Commission or Disability Rights Texas. They can tell you exactly what benefits you receive (SSI or SSDI) and provide information on how getting a job will affect your individual benefits and steps you can take to protect them while working.

**SSI** – If you work and get SSI, you have to report your income, and keep records of your reporting. For every \$2 you earn at work, only \$1 is removed from your SSI check. Now that's a good deal! It is always better to work. **There are federal work incentives that will help you keep your benefits while working:**

- Blind Work Expenses
- Earned Income Exclusion
- Student Earned Income Exclusion
- Work Related Expenses
- Plan to Achieving Self-Support
- Property Essential to Self Support
- Special SSI Payments for People Who Work
- Special Benefits for People Eligible Under Section 1619 (a) or (b)
- Reinstating Eligibility Without a New Application

**SSDI** – If you work and get SSDI, you still need to report your income from working, but you do not have to lose the benefit. **There are federal work incentives that will help you keep your benefits while working:**

- Trial Work Period

- Extended Period of Eligibility
- Expedited Reinstatement
- Continuation of Medicare coverage
- Medicare for People With Disabilities who Work
- Protection From Medical Continuing Disability Reviews
- SSDI Work Incentives
- Medicaid Buy-In Program

Visit: <https://hhs.texas.gov/services/health/medicaid-chip/programs/medicaid-buy-adults>

**Roadside Assistance:** Call TWC at (800) 628-5115 OR Disability Rights Texas (DRTx) at 1 (800) 252-9108





**The goal of everyone with a disability who wants to work should be to work and be as independent as possible, and that goal is achievable.**

Brooke got SSI until she was hired as the Grants Coordinator at Texas Advocates. But some people can work and keep their SSI benefits. Did you know you can work full-time and earn above minimum wage, and still get SSI? See the roadside assistance page for help.



# Support Services

Continue straight on the  
Employment Services Road



# State agency services are like AAA, they are here to help you find a job and keep a job.



## Vocational Rehabilitation

Vocational rehabilitation (VR), which is offered through the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC), is a temporary service to help people gain employment.

Go to Texas Workforce Commission and say, “I want to open a case and apply for employment services.”

VR has the following steps of service:

- (1)** Gets to know you to see if you can get services.
- (2)** Offers counseling and guidance, including information and support services to help you pick the best road to employment.
- (3)** Sends you to other helpful agencies to get you the services you need.
- (4)** Helps you find a job and keep a job.
- (5)** Gets you assistive technology you need on-the-job to help you perform your tasks at work.
- (6)** Can help you start your own business

If you are told you can't work, ask for trial work experience!

Trial Work Experience allows you to try multiple job experiences to help you identify your skills and abilities. Always try working before you say you can't.

## **VR and Employment Services**

These services help you while you work and support you keeping your job.

Supported Employment is a longer process than other models of employment services. If the counselor at the TWC determines the person eligible, but believes they may need ongoing support to maintain the job, that individual can use VR Supported Employment. The process involves an upfront in-depth assessment called the Supported Employment Assessment (SEA). The SEA identifies a variety of strengths and weaknesses. This information is used to help determine the appropriate work setting, tasks and the potential need for ongoing support after the case is closed. All those details go into the Individualized Plan for Employment. This is where working and getting support on the job begins. It is important to note that supported employment through VR is a time-limited service.

## Waiver Employment Services

If you have a waiver that helps you live in the community like, HCS, CLASS, TxHmL or DBMD, you can receive important employment services. These services must be on your individual plan of care. If you don't have a waiver, make sure you're on the [waitlist](#).

In order to use your waiver employment services, you must first use the employment services offered through TWC (we talked about TWC services on page 20). Call or email them and ask them to open a case for employment services. They must help you identify employers, conduct training, and identify your skills. You have to use services from TWC before you get waiver services.

**Waivers** get you Employment Assistance, which helps with:

- (1) Resume writing
- (2) Finding jobs
- (3) Developing skills and interests
- (4) Prepares you for interviews
- (5) Driving to interviews
- (6) Different job experiences

Supported Employment through the waiver can be used long-term and helps you with:

- (1) Transportation
- (2) Adaptations
- (3) On-the-job coaching
- (4) General supervision

**Roadside Assistance:** Getting waivers:

<https://www.thearcoftexas.org/information-resources/>

# Roadside Assistance

## For general questions:

### **The Arc of Texas**

www.TheArcofTexas.org

info@thearcoftexas.org

(512) 454-6694

## For benefits and services questions:

### **Texas Workforce Commission**

<https://twc.texas.gov/jobseekers/vocational-rehabilitation-services>

(800) 628-5115

customers@twc.state.tx.us

### **Health and Human Services Commission**

(512) 424-6500

### **Disability Rights Texas**

Intake.drtx.org

(512) 454-4816

## For transition questions:

### **Disability Rights Texas**

Intake.drtx.org

(512) 454-4816

### **SPEDEX**

[www.spedtex.org](http://www.spedtex.org)

1-855-773-3839

## Getting Your License

Now that you have all of this information and know you can work too, it is time to take the wheel and become an advocate for yourself and others! You can do this by living your life, going to work, and showing your community what you can do. You can also join us at The Arc of Texas and help advocate for better employment policies for Texans with disabilities at the Capitol. Join our movement and become an Arc of Texas advocate.

For help joining the movement and becoming an advocate, please visit  
The Arc of Texas' *Join the Movement* page:  
<https://secure.thearcoftexas.org/np/clients/thearcoftexas/account.jsp>

Here are some stories to show you what kind of drivers are sharing the road with you!



## **Dr. Larmartia Poullard | Parent Advocate**

***My greatest fear about letting my child go to work was*** the fear that he might not fit in socially and that people might not take the time to give to know him before they judged him.

While Blake appears to have a good command of language and an extensive vocabulary, he has significant challenges understanding figurative language, making inferences, understanding alternative meanings and grasping humor.

Because effective workplace communication requires not just an understanding of the words being spoken but an understanding of the unwritten rules that govern social communication and interactions, Blake has social communication challenges that are generally very apparent when you first meet him, but tend to mitigate over time as he becomes more comfortable in the environment. As such, first impressions and short interviews do not allow for an accurate assessment of Blake's ability to function in a given environment. Fortunately, his employer understands that and has given Blake the time that he needs to understand the requirements of his job, the social dynamics of the workplace and given Blake and his co-workers time to get to know each other and acclimate. Unfortunately, this is the exception, not the norm.

***The tools that I have you used that I wished every parent of a child with IDD knew are teaching self-advocacy early and often, understanding the importance of teaching your child good time management skills early and expecting excellence.***

### *Self-Advocacy*

Self-advocacy is the single most important skill, and the most powerful tool, that you teach your child with IDD. Your child has to know how to get what they need to be successful when you are not around. Self-advocacy should be taught early and often. Parents of children with IDD have a tendency to want to protect their children from others who don't understand them or cannot relate to them. While that is a natural instinct, it can be detrimental when the parent becomes the spokesperson and the child is silenced. Teach your child how to communicate and give your child the opportunity to do so. All too often, parents of children with IDD interrupt their children or complete their sentences or "clarify" what they were trying to say. That is a mistake that creates dependency. Self-advocacy creates the confidence needed for self-reliance and self-determination.

### *Expecting Excellence*

Finally, expect excellence from your child. I recall Blake saying to me when he graduated from 5<sup>th</sup> grade, "Can you believe that I am going to be in middle school? I am surprised that I made it this far" to which I replied, "I would be surprised if you didn't".

It has been my experience that teachers, administrators, family members and others often have low expectations for children with IDD. As a parent of a child with IDD, you have to give your child the tools to be successful and teach them to strive for excellence. Excellence is not to be confused with perfection, excellence is simply an expectation that your child will do the best that they can at all times.

***My child's employment and self-determination mean*** that he can live his life on his terms doing the things that bring him fulfillment and joy. Self-determination + employment = freedom!

## **James Parker | *Self Advocate***

James is a self-advocate in Houston, Texas with a bit more complex disability. For those who say employment depends on disability type or level of need, James is a prime example of self-determination is more powerful than diagnosis. He is non-verbal and uses a wheelchair, and he owns his own business. Shredding On the Go is a successful shredding company based in Houston and providing jobs to over a dozen other Texans with disabilities. James' employment road trip started years ago as a student when his support team, lead by his mother, when they identified his love of putting papers in a shredder. The transition team then focused on developing his shredding skills by trying different shredders, working on shredding in therapy, and making sure it was really his dream. Now, he's fully employed, successful, achieving his goals, and helping others do the same.

## **Brooke Hohfeld | *Self Advocate***

"In August of 2015 Texas Advocates was in the midst of some growing pains. I was on the board and as a board we decided it was time to work on becoming more independent. We knew that might mean hiring our own staff. We put the community organizing project on hold in October 2015 and began talking about what our future might look like. After walking through some really rocky waters we decided it was time to hire our own staff. I came down to Austin in December 2015 to meet with someone about a grant. That meeting was set up so we could begin to talk about taking the taking the project off of pause and beginning the project again. We laid everything out on the table of what we wanted the project to look like in the next part. The meeting lasted about two hours. Once it was over everyone begin leaving. Norine followed myself, Crysti and Michelle my advisors into the parking lot. The next words that came out of her mouth changed the trajectory of the rest of my life. She said I wish we could get you to move to Austin and go to work for Texas Advocates. Those were the words that I have been waiting to hear since 2009. When I got on the board in 2009 I always had a dream of going to work for Texas Advocates and live in Austin. I finally had my chance. The next hardest task besides moving boxes and actually moving was telling my mom of the news. I went home and slept on it for several days. One night about 11:30 after going to bed hours ago I texted Norine told her I wanted to be considered for the job. I went and woke my mom up and she was in utter shock she didn't say much and just went back to sleep. Over the next several days and weeks plans were began to be made the board interviewed me and before I knew it I was hired. I started work with Texas Advocates on Tuesday, March 1, 2016. Today I love my job and the people I work with. I get to work with advocates, attend meetings and do lots of social activities. Moving to Austin has changed my life in ways I never thought it would and that is largely thanks to Texas Advocates and the amazing job I have."

# Driver's Manual

**Vocational Rehabilitation (VR):** Vocational rehabilitation is a process which enables persons with functional, psychological, developmental, cognitive and emotional impairments or health disabilities to overcome barriers to accessing, maintaining or returning to employment or other useful occupation.

**Waivers:** Medicaid Waiver programs help provide services to people who would otherwise be in an institution, nursing home, or hospital to receive long-term care in the community. Prior to 1991, the Federal Medicaid program paid for services only if a person lived in an institution.

**Transition:** Transition planning is a process mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) for all students who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) in K-12 education. The purpose is to facilitate the student's move from school to post-school activities.

**SSI:** Supplemental Security Income is a United States government means-tested welfare program that provides cash assistance and health care coverage to people with low-income and limited assets who are either aged 65 or older, blind, or disabled.

**SSDI:** Social Security Disability Insurance pays benefits to you and certain members of your family if you are "insured," meaning that you worked long enough and paid Social Security taxes.

**Medicaid:** Medicaid is a health care program that assists low-income families or individuals in paying for doctor visits, hospital stays, long-term medical, custodial care costs and more. Medicaid is a joint

program, funded primarily by the federal government and run at the state level, where coverage may vary.

**ARD Meeting:** “ARD” is an acronym for Admission, Review and Dismissal. An ARD meeting is a meeting of a group of people who help to determine whether or not a student is eligible for special education and develops the Individual Education Program (IEP) for eligible students.

**Waitlist:** An interest list where Texans sign up for waiver services and wait for approval.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **What happens if I (or my loved one) goes to work and loses their benefits?**

Talking to a benefits counselor at TWC or DRTx **before you go to work** will help you avoid this situation. There are many work incentives to allow you to keep benefits, like Medicaid, while you're working. Knowing how to use the work incentives is very important.

## **What happens to my SSI or SSDI cash benefit if I go to work?**

Again, talking with a benefits counselor at TWC or DRTx will help you answer these questions before you (or a loved one) becomes employed. There are different work incentives for SSI and SSDI that help you maintain your benefit while you work. In some cases, the benefit may be reduced, but you always take home more money while you work.

## **What happens to my benefits if I get a job, but it does not work out?**

If you stop working, you can begin to receive your benefits like they were prior to getting a job. You may contact The Arc of Texas or DRTx for assistance.

## **I was denied by the Texas Workforce Commission. They said I'm unable to work, and I don't have a waiver. What do I do now?**

Return to TWC and ask for a Trial Work Experience. Find out why you were denied. Reapply for services. You may also contact The Arc of Texas for support.

## **I've worked at a sheltered workshop for years; can I get a job in the community?**

Yes! If you want to earn more money and work in the community, there are services available to help you. Go to TWC or your provider and tell them you're ready for competitive and integrated employment. Even if you were told in the past that you were not ready to work in the community, you have a right to get services that help you get a job in the community. Contact The Arc of Texas or DRTx for help.

“The only true DISability  
is low expectations.”  
-Keith Jones



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