When young adults graduate from high school, or age out of the special education system, many aspects of their lives change. Among these changes is the end of special education services and the beginning of adult services. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) transition regulations require schools to help students with disabilities make connections to adult services, and develop job goals and independent living plans (if appropriate) before they leave high school or a transition program. After graduation, adult services are provided by several different agencies that require an eligibility determination and may have waiting lists. No single piece of legislation defines services to adults with disabilities. Instead, there are a number of laws — for example, the Rehabilitation Act, Supplemental Security Income program, Americans with Disabilities Act, and the Workforce Investment Act — that impact the lives of individuals with disabilities.

The Developmental Disabilities (DD) Act is one of these laws, and it requires states to provide services and supports to adults with developmental disabilities. These services can include Day Training and Habilitation (DT&H) and Supported Employment Services (SES), along with more general services such as case management, medical assistance, semi-independent living services, housing assistance, and community involvement. In Minnesota the administration of – and application for – these services and supports is done through the counties. Eligibility is determined by diagnosis, needs, and other criteria. All Minnesota state-licensed day training and habilitation and supported employment service providers are arranged by county of service. For more information, visit http://mhcpproviderdirectory.dhs.state.mn.us/ and choose “Day Training and Habilitation” from the drop-down list in the search box.

Day Training and Habilitation (DT&H) is provided outside of the individual’s home to build and support meaningful community and leisure time activities and work experiences, as well as to teach a variety of new skills. Activity and skill development is provided to stimulate mental, emotional, and social growth based on the individual’s interests, desires, and abilities. Most individuals spend part of their day in a non-work environment. During this time they are involved in planned therapeutic services, community activities, and continuing education. Services, activities, and skill development might include personal grooming, housekeeping, food preparation, communication growth, social integration, money handling, behavior management, recreation opportunities, mobility skills, and basic work skills.

Emily has a developmental disability, limited range of motion, and low communication skills. Emily receives physical and occupational therapy to increase her range of motion and muscle strength. She also spends part of her day learning to use her communication device more fluently to self-advocate, and to verbally express her emotions and feelings. Once a week she volunteers at a nursing home and distributes flowers that she pre-arranges on her wheelchair tray. She is learning to use her communication device at the nursing home, and has begun using it on her own initiative in other community activities. As her muscle strength increases she will have a supported work experience at the DT&H facility.

Supported Employment Services (SES) includes on-site employment (formerly called Sheltered Workshops or Work Centers) and community-based supported employment. SES help individuals with disabilities develop personal, social, and vocational skills. On-site employment provides paid employment in a structured, protective environment with other individuals with disabilities. Work is usually contracted with local employers to do specific tasks such as final assembly, packaging, paper shredding, or applying labels. The pay is generally lower than minimum wage and is sometimes piece work. This employment is often
provided while building skills for supported or independent employment in the community.

Community-based supported employment provides paid employment in the community. The work setting must provide opportunities for interaction with non-disabled co-workers. There are a variety of models including individual job support (job coach), enclaves (a small group with a supervisor), and employment at small businesses, such as an artist cooperative, landscaping company, or a small engine repair shop. Common supported work includes retail sales, food service, hotel room cleaning, and company mail services. Work enclaves might include collecting recyclables, cleaning highway rest stops, or doing grounds maintenance. Community-based supported employment is often combined with work hours at the DT&H center, and community activities such as group recreation and mobility training.

In general, there is more demand for community-based employment than service providers are able to meet. Some service providers offer personalized initiatives such as Customized Employments. If community-based employment is an important goal for your son or daughter, be sure to request information about the service provider's community placement record. Also ask about alternative options they may offer during the employment search, such as meaningful volunteer opportunities.

Service providers vary in size, staffing, eligibility, and focus. Some providers might be focused only on day training and habilitation or supported employment services. Others might be licensed as both a DT&H and SES agency, and provide a wide range of other on-site and community-based services.

**What can be done before graduation?**

Before graduation the IEP team and a county case manager should provide the family and the student with ideas of appropriate programs, and information on eligibility requirements and waiting lists. Other parents, with experience in the programs, may also be good sources of information. Ultimately families will need to determine which program is the best fit for their son or daughter. Be prepared to meet with more than one agency and request tours of their facilities. Quality programs offer services, training, and supports to help each individual make progress toward reaching their full potential.

The following list of questions may provide further guidance to compare options, make decisions, and determine next steps.

- Which of your programs would my son or daughter be eligible for? Are there programs specifically for transition age youth?
- At what age should we apply for your service? How do we apply? Do we need a referral from the county or school?
- Is there a waiting list for any of the programs?
- What is the staff-to-adult ratio for each program?
- What types of jobs and/or non-work activities are available for my son or daughter in the center?
- What social opportunities do you provide? What opportunities do you provide for inclusive activities with non-disabled peers?
- Is there a fee for your services? Are there other costs? How do families usually pay for services? Is the program open only to individuals with specific funding sources?
- How many people do you serve? What is the age range? Do they have a particular diagnosis or disability? Do they live in a certain geographic location or county?
- Do you provide transportation to where we live? Is there an additional fee?
- Will your staff be able to accommodate my young adult's needs? Examples might include: wheelchair, restroom, or lunchroom assistance, hearing or language assistance, medication administration, or behavior management.
- What are you “known for?” What does your organization do well? What can you do for my young adult that other providers may not be able to offer?
- Do you work in partnership with any other organization or agency?
- What is the parent/family role and level of involvement in your program?
- What would a typical day for my son/daughter look like in your program?

Additional questions for supported employment might include:

- What percentage of the individuals you serve is currently working at jobs in the community?
- What types of jobs in the community are supported? What employment models are offered, such as person-centered planning, long-term job coaching, enclaves, or independent work?
- How many days per week would my son or daughter work? How many hours per day?
- What is the average weekly pay? How would my young adult be paid? How often would he or she receive a paycheck?
- What is the current average “wait time” for an enrolled
individual before he or she begins doing supported work in the community?
• Do you provide transportation to job sites in the community? Is there an additional fee?
• What specific job skills training do you provide?
• Can you provide long-term job supports or job advancement guidance?
• Will you help my young adult prepare for and find independent employment?
• What kinds of non-work opportunities do you offer? Therapy? Self-advocacy and self-determination training? Transportation training? Social interaction?

Resources:


County Social Services: The county social services directory is available at https://edocs.dhs.state.mn.us/lfserver/Public/DHS-0005-ENG

Day Training and Habilitation/Supported Employment Services: All Minnesota state-licensed day training and habilitation and supported employment service providers for persons with developmental disabilities are arranged by county of service. For more information, visit http://mhcппroviderdirectory.dhs.state.mn.us/ and choose “Day Training and Habilitation” from the drop-down list in the search box.