



State of Connecticut
Department of Developmental Services

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Innovative Employment and Day Practices during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 (coronavirus) health crisis has impacted every aspect of supports for individuals with intellectual disability including Employment and Day Services. COVID-19 is a rapidly evolving situation, and may seem overwhelming to families, individuals and providers.

During this challenging time, DDS continues to work with the provider community to promote creative and innovative practices that focus on connecting to the individuals we support.

Virtual resources such as phone calls, or video conferencing or any other appropriate communication methods can provide supports and services remotely. The intent of virtual communication options is to provide a means for people to stay connected to one another, help resolve issues as they arise, assess for health and wellness, and to offer opportunities to continue their growth and development within an electronic environment.

This document provides a few examples of how providers are utilizing virtual communication options to provide supports and services to individuals in creative and innovative ways while maintaining the health and safety of individuals and their staff.

Marc, Inc. has implemented virtual supports and created an all-day program that individuals participate in starting with morning engagement program and continued interactive programming throughout the entire day. Programming includes lessons on making lunch and doing laundry, a pet show and tell, how to interview for a job and even a dance party. Marc, Inc. staff are also using electronic communication to stay connected to families and do daily check in with individuals. MARC has instituted a technology loaning program for those individuals and families who needed the devices to participate.

Sarah, Inc. began offering services to 35 individuals who chose to participate in virtual services. Sarah Inc. has implemented a Direct Support Professionals (DSP) online training module called Open Futures. Open Futures is a training platform that helps DSP learners apply what they are learning to improve the lives of the people they support. Each module has been designed to help learners continually reflect on the needs and lives of the people they support. After successful completion of 15 training hours, staff receive a Certificate of Completion. Sarah, Inc. has also created Google Classroom accounts with lessons curriculum for individuals to access and to provide individuals and families as well as residential staff alternative activities throughout the day.

Oak Hill is utilizing their Adaptive Sports & Fitness center to encourage healthy movement and physical activities. Oakhill is using a model of Tele-fitness to stay connected with individuals and families.

Waterbury ARC, Inc. has incorporated social interaction for individuals to stay connected with friends and support staff. They created a Facebook page called Friends and their day supports service started a weekly video teaching safety during the COVID-19 situation.

Marrakech has created a Task Force which will focus on Quality of Life activities for individuals to participate in activities such as indoor scavenger hunts, virtual trips, gardening and other activities.

Our Employment and Day Service Providers are using various forms of electronic supports to connect with individuals via Face Time, Zoom, Group Me, Skype, Face Book and other virtual platforms to keep individuals, families and staff engaged. Many providers are offering virtual learning of life skills, employment skills and safety skills on the coronavirus, and recreation and leisure activities. Providers report that many of the individuals and families supported look forward to learning and socialization daily.

Nationally, Developmental Disability agencies are working with their provider community to implement virtual and electronic supports.

Colorado Cross Disability Coalition offers a monthly calendar of events, livestreams and virtual meetings with a variety of topics for individuals, families and staff.

Link: <http://www.ccdconline.org/calendar/colorado-cross-disability-coalition-ccdc-advocacy-meetings-and-events/>

Missouri encourages providers to use telehealth, virtual meetings, and remote supports while modifying activity to enable continuity of needed supports. Like Connecticut, Missouri encourages providers to use non-public facing remote communication methods such as Apple Face Time, Facebook Messenger video chat, Google Hangouts video, or Skype. <http://static.smallworldlabs.com/umass/content/COVID-MO%20guidanceforemployment.pdf>

Oregon Disability Services along with the Emergency Services Coordinator with Occupational Health, created a podcast. The podcast covered COVID-19 and resources for family, individuals and providers. The podcast provided a link to Powtoon, which is essentially a very informative cartoon-type video that shows people in a realistic way to explain what COVID-19 is and can be used by family members, individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and the provider community.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJ8eeC-tVD4&feature=youtu.be>

Connecticut continues to explore and implement best practices aligning with national trends. We are encouraging employment and day service providers to implement virtual and remote services, and to support individuals and families to stay connected, not feel isolated, and think about what is needed to stay resilient during this crisis.