

Employment First Movement

The Employment First Movement started in the United States and is framework for systems change that is centered on the premise that **all** citizens, including individuals with significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in integrated employment and community life. The Canadian Association for Supported Employment (CASE) is the national voice for Supported Employment in Canada and has issued the following statement with regards to the "Employment First Movement" in a Canadian Perspective on 'Employment First'

The Canadian Association for Supported Employment (CASE) has been promoting employment inclusion for people with disabilities since 1999. CASE is a national network of employment inclusion service providers who collaborate to share information and develop resources to foster greater outcomes and success for the Job Seekers we collectively serve.

CASE wishes to express complete agreement with the Employment First Movement as its basic tenets mirror the Best Practices ratified by CASE almost a decade ago. The CASE Best Practice Document (written in 2003) clearly states:

All processes, strategies and philosophies are designed to promote greater workforce inclusion, personal choice and independence for persons with disabilities.

Processes, strategies or philosophies are not allowed to interfere with building personal capacity or reduction of poverty for persons with disabilities.

Employment services focus on workforce participation and inclusion rather than segregated environments or indefinite training scenarios.

Supports work towards competitive employment with wages that are consistent with regional labour standards and towards real work environments - the most effective methods to teach and/or assess employment skills. (These methods are also the most effective for facilitating increased social inclusion in the workplace.)

The American-based Employment First Movement asserts two primary points:

1. Employment in the general workforce is the first and preferred outcome in the provision of publicly funded services for all working age citizens with disabilities.
2. Employment is defined as: working in an integrated setting, where people with disabilities work alongside other employees who do not have disabilities and where they have the same opportunities to participate in all activities in which other employees participate. Employment also denotes working for at least minimum wage or being self-employed.

-Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE)

As one can see, there is agreement and compatibility between the CASE respective values statements and definitions of 'real work' and compensation. CASE has been promoting valued social roles for people with disabilities through employment inclusion and equal wages for many years and, as such, supports the Employment First Movement as well as its growth and acceptance in Canada.

For more information on Employment First:

<http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/EmploymentFirst.htm>

<http://www.supportedemployment.ca/employment-first-or-employment-when/>

<http://apse.org/>