

## The ARC of Illinois/SWTCIE - QIDP Virtual Conference 2026 Q&A

**dbuffett 10:25 AM**

Q: I am finding challenges with a grocery store that's having one of my participant's work (part-time) under minimum wage, as well, as having them to work over-time. This has impacted the participant's SNAP benefits and SS. I have offered to support the participant and providing key words to advocate for themselves. The participant very eager and this grocery store is truly taking advantage. I think the information presented today should be shared with the varies business having understanding of disabilities and the recent changes with the State of IL. Thank you!

**A: This is a very unfortunate scenario! As for the store paying that your client below minimum wage. It is possible to file a complaint [The Illinois Department of Labor](#) with on their website or by calling 1-866-372-4365.**

**Social Security Counseling – if the person has a DRS Counselor, I suggest reaching out to them and ask to be connected to someone who can provide Social Security Benefits Counseling. This can also be obtained directly from the Social Security Administration by calling 1-800-772-1213.**

**One of our goals is building community awareness with the upcoming change in Illinois regarding the Dignity in Pay Act. We work to connect with local businesses, chambers of commerce, and other employer groups to increase awareness of CIE for individuals with disabilities.**

**Kelsey Davis 10:28 AM**

Q: I believe that what you're saying is true, with the right supports, individuals could be successful in community employment, but how do we encourage more employers to give our individuals the chance to be successful?

**A: We have found that much depends on the relationship that is built with the employer. First finding out what the business does, and what needs aren't being met, and building a relationship BEFORE the conversation ever turns to employment opportunities is beneficial. Also the customized employment route is one to consider, and again it takes relationship building with the business. Are you an employment specialist? Have you gone through the ACRE training that Virginia Commonwealth University offers? This is a 12 week, somewhat self paced online course that all SWTCIE employment specialists have go through and it teaches how to approach and engage with potential employers. I can get more information about the next offering of ACRE and let Rebecca know. In the meantime, you can check out our [SWTCIE website](#)**

*for videos as well the [VCU RTTC website](#) for videos and resources related to supported and customized employment.*

**Sharyn Goldrich 10:28 AM**

Q: We are seeing more and more resistance to hiring an individual with a disability. How would you suggest getting the word out to potential employers? Also, once an individual runs out of service hours through a DRS contract, how do we encourage natural supports to be more involved?

Second, while I see how it can be said that saying "they can never work" is selling them short, there are still limiting factors for many individuals who worked in a sheltered setting where they were supported for their behavioral/medical/social needs which would not be as feasible in the community. There is also the lack of person resources available for individuals in the community since it is more spread out. So, I understand the importance of this, however on the practical side it faces a huge uphill battle.

***A: Finding employers that will to hire individuals with disabilities is no easy task. Our Employment Specialist work tirelessly to identify different business sites and build individual relationships with hiring managers. We also encourage them to utilize family and friends who may have business connections, attend local career fairs, host their own career fairs, connect with community chambers of commerce, etc***

**Anonymous attendee 10:28 AM**

Q: Then how do our clients get the support if they are closed because they are only allowed so many hours? They cant do a community job unless they have someone with them at all times but we cant provide that? This sounds good for people that can thrive in those types of environments.

***A: The individuals/job seekers we work with have an open case with DRS to get them started. Once their case is closed, there is extended service hours that can be applied for through the Divison of Development Disabilities (DDD). As some of our SWTCIE participants have had successful closures with DRS, they have been able to receive job coaching support through DDD.***

**Anonymous attendee 10:30 AM**

Q: Will there be additional community employment funding available?

***A: There has been additional funding and training opportunities offered to Community Rehab Providers (CRP) who will be moving away from sheltered subminimum wage work over the next 5 years.***

**There is the [Dignity in Pay Transition Fund](#) which is being offered to select CRP's in Illinois.**

**Sharyn Goldrich 10:31 AM**

Q: If a contractor worked with an agency on "piecework" for lack of a better term, but paid minimum wage, would that be an issue if it took place in a more supported atmosphere?

**A: Hi Sharyn, I think I understand what you are asking, so I'll try to answer, but please follow up if I have not done so...The Dignity in Pay legislation states that starting January 1, 2030 there will no longer be 149(c) certificates issued in the state of Illinois. So, everyone, even if they work in a sheltered workshop environment, they will need to be paid at least a minimum wage. What the SWTCIE project is emphasizing is the benefits for individuals to work outside of the segregated, sheltered work environment and to be a part of their community where they work alongside their non-disabled peers. So while the Dignity in Pay Act has a focus on the wage rate, there are also benefits for those who gain employment in the community, should they choose to. Social aspects, the potential for benefits, and being a more active member of their community, just to name a few. Again, let me know if this does not address what you are asking – sbergf2@illinois.edu**

**Caroline Graczyk 10:35 AM**

Q: I have a home based client that has been working with DRS for over 10 years to try to find a job in the community. Every person they have worked with has had no luck with assisting them to find a community job. We are located in Chicago, so there is no lack of jobs. This person has high support needs specifically around communication and physical limitations. Most community employers are hesitant to give them a chance. Do you have any suggestions for extra support?

**A: I am curious to know if the client is only working with their DRS Counselor to obtain employment or if they are working with a local Community Rehab Provider?  
Kmenke@illinois.edu**

**balvarez 10:37 AM**

Q: Can you work with JVS and SWTCIE or do you partner? Also do you only provide this service once the participant is out of transition?

**A: Currently SWTCIE is only being offered through 6 CRP agencies (Association for Individual Development, CTF Illinois, The Workshop, Human Support Services,**

***Centerstone, and Kreider Services) throughout Illinois. This is due to the fact that it is a grant funded demonstration project.***

***Yes, SWTCIE services do not begin until a person exits high school or a transition program. However, we do work with local school/transition programs to identify individuals who would benefit from SWTCIE services after they exit.***

**Anonymous attendee 10:54 AM**

Q: I have an individual that is in host homes in Bloomington, wants to move to his own apartment, but does not want community employment. How do we get him to do any of this?

**A: Does the individual understand the cost and responsibility of living in his own apartment? I would try to do some 'reality check' activities with him. Have him check into the cost of an apartment, utilities, all the things related to someone living independently. If he does have a source of income, then compare that to the costs that he has found. Help him to understand that he will most likely need to have a job in the community in order to be able to pay for the lifestyle he desires. Often times, the individual doesn't have a real concept of what things cost or that living in an apartment is more than a rent payment. Just try to help him do some discovery on his own and facilitate conversations with others who can help – a banker, a landlord, people in his life that live independently. Help him to learn these things on his own, rather than just tell him. If he's unwilling to work, you obviously can't force him, but then his options are pretty limited.**

**Anonymous attendee 10:55 AM**

Q: When our clients are not their own guardians, we often run up against guardians who are fearful of off-site employment or the idea of their loved one working in the community, even if the client has worked hard toward this goal and expressed that CIE is their "dream". As a Q, I know my role is to advocate for the individuals I serve while respecting the boundaries of guardians. While not a policy question - this is also a challenge and I appreciate the bullet point of education for guardians/parents on CIE. I was wondering if this education includes a conversation about allaying fears/case study evidence as well as benefit conversations and general information. I understand this heavy-lifting should come from the Q and leveraging their relationships with guardians, but sometimes an outside perspective can instill some confidence and these types of resources would really help as sometimes guardians can be a barrier to success in our clients participating in CIE.

^ his main focus is just staying home and playing games most of the day and sleeping and eating.

**A: Relationship building with the guardian/family is so important, What is the fear? Loss of benefits? Fear of lack of support? That will guide how you deal with the family and build that rapport that is necessary. If their fear is loss of benefits, talk to a benefits planner and have them break things down for them. If it is the lack of support, assure them that supported employment is just that. Supports are put into place until the individual can rely on the natural supports (co-workers) in their workplace and the job coach can fade from the worksite, or if the individual will need continuous support, then investigate funding through DDD to help with that. Of course, the individual will need to work first with DRS and have a successful closure with DRS before DDD can enter the picture. You might show the guardians/family some of our SWTCIE videos (go to Youtube and search on SWTCIE). We have many videos of individuals participating in the SWTCIE project working and also interviews with family and supervisors that demonstrate their success.**

**Caroline Graczyk 10:57 AM**

Q: After hearing more of the presentation, I think this individual would be a very good fit for SWTCIE that I mentioned previously. They want to be employed SO BADLY but no one has been successful in helping them. They have cerebral palsy, use a rollator for mobility, and their speech is very difficult to understand. They need more support; how would I go about getting them more support they need to find community employment?

**balvarez 11:06 AM**

Q: Please let me know after the conference if SWTCIE is available to students in transition or only after they've moved out of transition. Thank you

***A: SWTCIE services do not begin until a person exits high school or a transition program. However, we do work with local school/transition programs to identify individuals who would benefit from SWTCIE services after they exit.***

**From Verna's phone to everyone 10:34 AM**

Q: Are there any incentives for businesses to hire our friends with disabilities?

***A: There are Tax Incentives for businesses who hire individuals with disabilities. Please see the below link for more information:***

***[Business Tax Credit information](#)***

**From Sharyn Goldrich to everyone 10:54 AM**

Q: Then does SWTCIE provide support to an individual longer than DRS would?

***A: The individuals/job seekers we work with have an open case with DRS to get them started. Once their case is closed, there is extended service hours that can be applied for through the Division of Development Disabilities (DDD). As some of our SWTCIE participants have had successful closures with DRS, they have been able to receive job coaching support through DDD.***

**From britney to everyone 10:59 AM**

Q: Have you had any luck finding job opportunities for individuals with physical disabilities? we support adults with cerebral palsy and spina bifida who would need personal care support in the community.

***A: This is where relationship building with employers and assessing the skills of the individual will be very important. Will it be a challenge? Probably, and honestly, most likely. Is it impossible? No. But, it will take time to find the right employer and the right fit for the individual. Customized employment is probably going to be the best route to go.***

**From balvarez to everyone 11:00 AM**

Q: Is SWTCIE available during transition or once the student has left transition?

***A: SWTCIE services do not begin until a person exits high school or a transition program. However, we do work with local school/transition programs to identify individuals who would benefit from SWTCIE services after they exit.***

**From Jamie Benefiel to everyone 11:01 AM**

Q: I have an individual who had their benefits cut after working more than 10 hours a work. This was with our agency's financial aid. Where can we get more information on benefits counseling? The person had to choose between cutting hours or losing benefits.

***A: Social Security Counseling – if the person has a DRS Counselor, I suggest reaching out to them and ask to be connected to someone who can provide Social Security Benefits Counseling. This can also be obtained directly from the Social Security Administration by calling 1-800-772-1213.***