



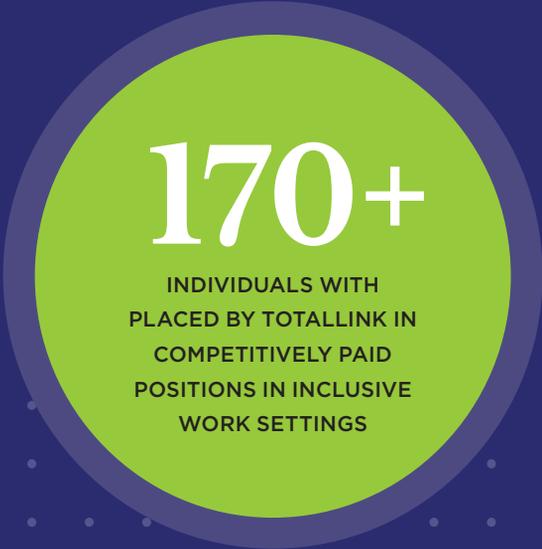
TotalLink to Community

Customized Employment



Everyone wants the opportunity to contribute and belong to their community. When people work, they are happier, more self-confident, have more friends and social opportunities, greater financial security, and more independence.

People with disabilities are no different from everyone else – we all have talents, skills, and abilities we want to share with the rest of the world. We strongly believe that giving individuals an opportunity to work provides a critical foundation for building a meaningful life.



170+

INDIVIDUALS WITH
PLACED BY TOTALLINK IN
COMPETITIVELY PAID
POSITIONS IN INCLUSIVE
WORK SETTINGS



What Is Customized Employment?

Customized employment is a “best practice” strategy recognized across the country by experts in the field of employment for people with complex needs. It occurs in businesses in the community or in businesses owned by the individual, allowing the job seeker to remain in the home community, earn a competitive wage, and work at a job that dovetails with their interests.

Customized Employment:

- Focuses on an individualized, person-centered process, driven by the interests, strengths, and conditions for success of each individual.
- Results in a customized job that will meet the needs that the individual has for employment, the conditions necessary for their success, and the needs that the business has for valued, contributing employees.
- Is successful when the job seeker is treated as an individual who is free to make choices about their life’s direction; is afforded respect and dignity; is assumed to have competencies that, if not readily obvious, can be discovered; and is provided with high-quality employment opportunities and services.

How it Works

Person-Centered Approach

At TotalLink, we start with a comprehensive assessment aimed at identifying our job seeker's skills, interests, levels of support, and ideal work conditions. Self-employment and micro-enterprise are also creative options for job seekers.

This person-centered approach encompasses six essential steps for each job seeker with a goal of competitive employment.





63%

OF ALL OF OUR JOBS
ARE FOUND THROUGH
COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

TotalLink to Community utilizes the principles of customized employment to create sustainable jobs that meet the needs of both job seekers and the businesses that employ them.

Making Connections

Once the living resume is completed, the job seeker presents at a Community Action Team (CAT) meeting. CAT meetings bring together a group of stakeholders from the job seeker's networks as well as other community connections creating a circle of engaged community members to help support the job seeker's goals. The meetings provide the job seeker the opportunity to share their living resume and allow participants to celebrate the job seeker's gifts and talents and all they have to offer the employment world. CAT meetings are designed to kickstart the job development phase and promote brainstorming about an individual's strengths and skills, employment themes, and community connections that may match with those themes.

Next, we set up informational interviews with contacts identified through the CAT meetings and the job development process. The process is much less stressful for our job seekers than a traditional job search. During these interviews, we get a feel for the culture of the company. This is not an opportunity to "sell" a job seeker, but rather a conversation about their business and an opportunity to determine where there is a win/win position for the job seeker and the employer.

Possible employment outcomes include a typical wage position, a non-typical customized position, a micro-enterprise, a business within a business, or some combination of the above.

Support for Employers



Role of the Employment Specialist and Job Coach - Supporting the Employer

The Employment Specialist is an integral part of the TotalLink team and is responsible for supporting job seekers to reach their employment goals. Employment Specialists match job seeker skill sets with job opportunities to meet the needs of both the job seeker and the employer. They also provide support to the job seekers, their families, and employers in the areas of communication, coordination, education, and on-the-job support.

TotalLink's Employment Specialists assist job seekers in finding and keeping a job. Utilizing the six steps of Customized Employment, our Employment Specialists ensure a successful job experience for the employee and an excellent employee for the business.

Job seekers receive one-on-one on-site job coaching support to develop confidence and mastery of skills and tasks with a goal of being self-sufficient and working independently.

The Employment Specialists provide support for the employer and co-workers through ongoing education and open communication. Even once the employee is working independently and job coaching support has faded, TotalLink continues to partner with employers for additional training, check-ins, and support as needed.

Common Myths – Hiring People with Disabilities

Myth #1: Reasonable accommodations are expensive.

Reality: Many employees with disabilities require nothing more than the same consideration an employer may already be providing to its non-disabled employees, such as flexible work schedules, telecommuting, or restructured workstations. A recent research report from the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), found that more than half of U.S. employers surveyed had zero accommodation costs, and the rest incurred a one-time expense of approximately \$500 to accommodate an employee with a disability.

Myth #2: Workers with disabilities have more absences.

Reality: A study from DePaul University, commissioned by the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce, found that retail sector workers with disabilities had fewer unscheduled absences than those without disabilities.

Myth #3: Employees with disabilities are too difficult or controversial for employers to take disciplinary action.

Reality: Employees with disabilities should be treated the same as able-bodied employees – with respect and dignity; as well as given opportunities for advancement and coaching when required. Treating employees with disabilities with “kid gloves” creates a standard that’s not good for the general population of employees or the person with a disability.

A Family Affair

The Role of Families

Parents and families are asked to play an active role in the customized employment process by openly sharing information, helping their adult child to communicate and keep appointments with their employment specialist, and working as a collaborative team member through regular email and phone communication. Parents who serve as the legal guardian for their adult child are actively engaged throughout the process with weekly communication from the employment specialist.

How Benefits are Affected by Employment?

Parents are often concerned about what might happen to their son or daughter's Social Security benefits once they are employed. During the customized employment process, TotalLink connects job seekers and their families to the State of Illinois Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) program for a benefit analysis to help them understand their adult child's benefit package.

TotalLink can help you explore the options available that help people with disabilities work and maintain their benefits. A Plan for Achieving Self Support (Pass) may be recommended and developed for individuals who may develop a micro-enterprise.

Transition Planning

TotalLink uses our State of Illinois contracts to help families plan the transition.

TotalLink has a Supported Employment Program, Customized Employment Program, and a Milestone contract with the Illinois Department of Human Services Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS). These contracts help defray the cost of providing job seekers customized employment services.

Transition-age youth may be eligible to receive supported employment through DRS the semester prior to graduation to ensure continuity of services after graduation.

TotalLink encourages families to start building the bridge to adult employment services when transition planning starts by inviting one of our Employment Specialists to attend IEP meetings.

TotalLink also offers private pay for Customized Employment, job coaching, and 1:1 coaching opportunities.



OUR FIRST JOB SEEKERS
HAVE RETAINED THE SAME
JOB FOR MORE THAN

8 years

TotalLink Community Partners

Abt Electronics
Ace Hardware
Affordable Portables
Aks Allure Salon and Spa
Alphabet Acres Daycare
Andreas Hogue Salon
Blick Art Materials
B'Nai Jehoshua Beth Elohim
Carol's Cookies
Ceciel's Flowers
CJE Senior Life - Weinberg Community
for Senior Living
CMX Market Cinemas Old Orchard
College Park Athletic Club
District 28 KidCare
First Bank Chicago
Fields Jeep
Finley's

Fresh Market
Georgia Nut Company
Good Earth Lighting
Grace Lutheran Church
Horizon Therapeutics
Humenik Dentistry
Jennings Chevrolet
Jewel
Kids First Pediatrics
Lou Malnati's
Lux Salon
Mariano's
Marriott Suites
Mark Drug & Medical Supply
Marshalls
Max & Benny's
Michael's Chicago Style Red Hots
MPM Food Equipment Group

Northbrook Public Library
North Suburban YMCA
Peachtree Place
Pet Supplies Plus
PostNet
Quantum Group
REI
Restore Hyper Wellness
Revolution Dancewear
SNAP Diagnostics
Spatz's Management
Teddi Kossof Salon Spa
Trader Joe's
True Value Hardware
Wags on Willow
Walgreens
Whole Foods Market
Zebra Technologies Corporation



**We invite you to join us in bringing inclusion into our communities.
Contact info@totallink2.org or visit totallink2.org for more information.**

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