
Myths and Facts about Vocational Centers for People with I/DD

MYTH: People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families are dissatisfied with vocational work centers.

FACT: Vocational work centers (also known as sheltered workshops) are valued for the services they provide to people with I/DD who are unable to adapt to competitive employment. When these centers are threatened with closure, employees with I/DD and their families are the most fervent advocates for keeping them open.

MYTH: Vocational work centers are isolating environments.

FACT: These work centers are part of the greater community. Those who choose jobs at work centers develop a sense of accomplishment and self-worth because of work completed. Far from being isolating, they offer people a sense of camaraderie and a chance to interact with their peers.

MYTH: Vocational work centers are the only choice for work for people with intellectual disabilities.

FACT: There are many resources available through state vocational rehabilitation departments to assist with opportunities for competitive employment. No one can legally be forced to work in a vocational work center.

MYTH: Work centers do not provide opportunities to transition to competitive employment in the community.

FACT: For those who can develop skills to work in competitive employment, work centers provide opportunities to learn skills necessary to be successful such as being on time, working with others, and completing assigned tasks.

MYTH: All people, no matter the nature of their disability, can find competitive employment.

FACT: Some individuals have more difficulty adapting to competitive employment. Vocational centers provide opportunities for work while providing more specialized supports such as personal hygiene care, preventing and attending to seizures, or helping with behavioral issues and developing social skills.

MYTH: Work centers do not provide for meaningful jobs.

FACT: Examples of work opportunities include: manufacturing, item assembly, recycling, packaging, repair, and machine operating. <https://dese.mo.gov/special-education/sheltered-workshops/jobs-performed-sheltered-workshops>

MYTH: Oversight of vocational work centers is lax.

FACT: According to the Department of Labor: "All subminimum wages must be reviewed and adjusted, if appropriate, at periodic intervals. At a minimum, the productivity of hourly paid workers must be reevaluated every six months and a new prevailing wage survey must be conducted at least every twelve months."

<https://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/whdfs39.pdf>

MYTH: Vocational work centers violate the 1999 Supreme Court Olmstead decision.

FACT: The 1999 Supreme Court Olmstead decision supports CHOICE. Closing these centers contradicts the opinion expressed by the majority of Justices in Olmstead by eliminating a desired, chosen and helpful employment option.

MYTH: Eliminating 14(c) certificates of the Fair Labor Standards Act will increase employment rates of all individuals with disabilities.

FACT: 14(c) wage certificates of the Fair Labor Standards Act allow employers to afford to provide the specialized services needed by people with I/DD who are not able to adapt to competitive employment. Eliminating these wage certificates will force the closure of vocational work centers, eliminating jobs with no replacement in competitive employment.