

# Examining Biases to Support Employment as a Means out of Poverty

**At-a-Glance:** Poverty affects individuals with disabilities at a much higher rate than individuals without disabilities. Employment is an essential component in escaping poverty. Vocational rehabilitation professionals must be keenly aware of—and willing to challenge—their own unconscious biases that may limit their ability to support people with disabilities pursuing employment.

## Key Findings

- Individuals with disabilities experience poverty at twice the rate of individuals without.
- Workers with disabilities receive .64 cents to each dollar earned by a worker without disabilities.
- Under the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Department of Labor can issue certificates that allow organizations to pay individuals with disabilities at rates below minimum wage.
- To help people with disabilities gain living-wage employment, practitioners must recognize and rectify their own unintentional biases.
- Long-term solutions to this cyclical problem involve many different strategies.

## Putting It into Practice

Employment can lead to independence and financial stability. Vocational rehabilitation professionals support people with disabilities in finding and engaging in meaningful work. To avoid becoming another obstacle in consumers' pursuit of employment, practitioners must:

- Engage in regular self-reflection to monitor themselves for bias.
- Continue advocating for legislation that guarantees fair wages.
- Use language that empowers consumers.
- Encourage whole person and whole family supports for escaping poverty.

- Support early resource investment for young children who have disabilities.

### **More about this Research**

This study focused on high poverty rates experienced by individuals with disabilities. It also emphasized the social, cultural, and financial benefits of employment for these populations. Poverty and disability are intertwined in such a way that one may result in the other. Poverty also affects more than just income: it affects health, education, food, housing, and social/economic isolation.

### **Learn More**

Access this research by visiting the [Project E3 Research Database](#)

Citation: Nye-Lengerman, K., & Nord, D. (2016). Changing the message: Employment as a means out of poverty. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 44 243-247.

### ***Questions? Feedback?***

Do you have questions or feedback about putting this research into practice? We're waiting to hear from you! Send us your [questions or feedback](#).

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Have you tried any of these practices? Have you had success working with these populations in your area? Tell us more and [join our conversation](#).