

# Customized Employment and Disability Advocacy

Real Life Stories Transformed  
into Training Tools and Techniques



# Intro

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- Self-Advocate
- Passionate about Customized Employment
- A Disability Advocate with MANY hats
- Leader in the Disability Community
- Special Olympics Multi-Sport Athlete
- Hot Air Balloon Crew-Chief in Training for my Dad
- Telos Community Inclusion Employee (10/29/25)
- A Person with a Disability



# Agenda

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- My Story
- Customized Employment
- Disability Advocacy
- Review challenges and obstacles
- Review facts and strategies
- Role play activity

# Learning Objectives

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- Define and understand Customized Employment and Disability Advocacy.
- Identify setbacks, challenges, and strategies in Customized Employment and Disability Advocacy.

# Customized Employment (CE) is

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- Personalized job development strategy
- Matches an individual's unique strengths and interests
- Matches the needs of the individual to the needs of a specific employer
- Creating tailored roles
- Negotiating integrated competitive work

(Department of Labor)

# Discussion Question

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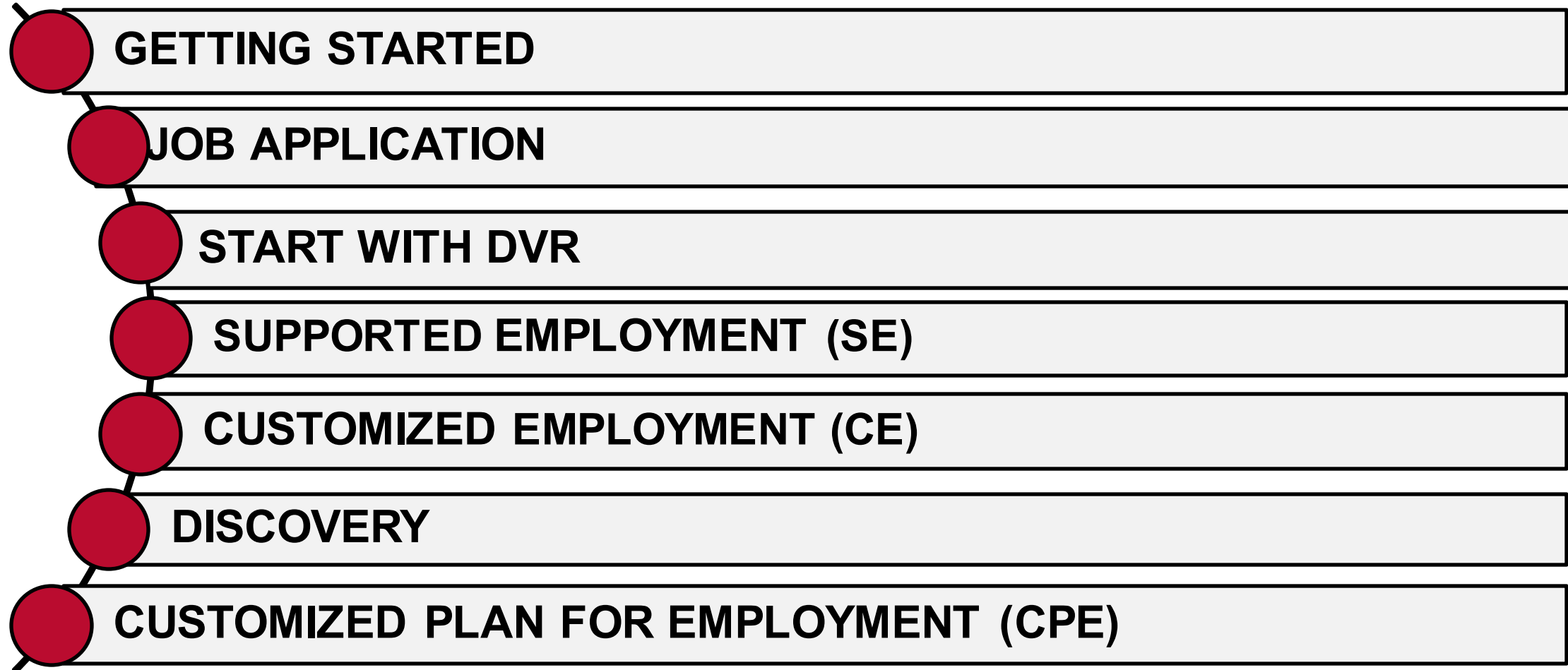
What are some examples of Customized Employment?

# Examples of CE

- Job carving/creation
- Task reassignment
- Flexible roles/hours
- Customized environment
- Job sharing
- Job negotiation
- Access/accommodations



# Customized Employment (CE) Timeline



# Disability Advocacy is

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- Eliminates systemic barriers
- Promotes, protects, and defends human rights
- Ensures equal access
- Empowers individuals

(Disability Advocacy Resource Unit “DARU”)

# Discussion Question

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What are some examples of Disability Advocacy?

# Five Facts about Customized Employment (CE) and Disability Advocacy

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## Customized Employment IS

- Person-centered
- NOT fitting the individual into existing jobs
- Driven by the strength of the individual seeking Customized Employment
- Driven by the interest of the individual seeking Customized Employment
- Customized job development

## Disability Advocacy IS

- Person-centered
- Building support networks
- Having self-determination
- Understanding your rights and responsibilities
- Advocating for your rights and responsibilities
- Knowing how and when to advocate

# Customized Employment and Disability Advocacy

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# Discovery is

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- A person-centered process
- Designed to identify a job seekers strengths, interests, needs and skills
- DOESN'T focus on their limitations
- Serves as the foundation for Customized Employment
- Helps to define specific contributions an individual can make to an specific employer

# Role Play

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Pair up into teams of two with the person sitting near you. One person IS the Job Seeker and the other the Job Developer.

# Role Play Directions

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- Spend 2 minutes getting to know your job seeker
- Share ONE thing you learned about your job seeker
- Switch roles Now switch roles and the person who was the job developer now becomes the job seeker
- Take another 2 minutes to find out about your job seeker

# Debrief? Discovery & CE

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- Share ONE thing you learned about your job seeker
- What kind of questions can you ask to make it as a job developer?
- What are some strategies to get to know the job seeker on a deeper level?

# Overcoming Challenges and Obstacles

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# How to Overcome

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# How to Overcome

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# How to Overcome

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# How to Overcome

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# How to Overcome

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# From a Dream to a Reality: Its Worth the Wait

## 1 First Independence

Became a reality **beginning in 2012** when attended Eastern NM University- Roswell including moving from Dorms to Apartment

## 2 Present Nationally

Became a reality in **June of 2025** when presented in Washington DC at the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

## 3 Getting a Job

Became reality in **October of 2025** when I got hired at Telos Community Inclusion as an Administrative Assistant where I work Tue, Wed, Fri 9am-1pm

**Any  
Questions?**

# References

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- Disability Advocacy Resource Unit:  
<https://daru.org.au/daru-publication/what-is-advocacy/definitions>
- US Department of Labor  
<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/cie/customized-employment>

# Thank you & Contact Info

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Amelia-Ann Dickey

**Phone number on request**



[ameliaann.dickey17@gmail.com](mailto:ameliaann.dickey17@gmail.com)

# From a Dream to a Reality: A Real-Life Story

Meet your Presenter:



**Amelia Ann Dickey**  
Multi-Risk Disability  
Advocate & Leader  
Albuquerque,  
New Mexico





## THE ADVOCACY SEED:


### The Growth of a Disability Leader

**PLANT YOUR OWN SEED:**


- Focus on the WHO, not the WHAT
- Intentionally use person-centered rather than identity-centered language
- Share inspirational stories & journeys to encourage others to begin their own
- Encourage other advocates & grow the community of disability supporters
- See the fruits of your growth become strong trees and sturdy supports




**The Advocacy Seed**  
*planting the seed*




**The Sprout**  
*an emerging voice*



**The Sapling**  
*branching out*



**The Mature Tree**  
*standing tall*



**The Harvest**  
*grateful fruit*

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| <p><i>This presentation highlights the journey of one person from sitting on the sidelines to being fully involved</i></p> <p>61 million adults in America live with disabilities. In New Mexico, approximately 2.1 million people live with disabilities. Reaching out to this population to inspire and encourage them to become advocates is the goal of this presentation. This presentation will inspire others to become leaders and advocates for their own communities.</p> | <p><b>EARLY INFLUENCES</b></p> <p>Growing up, I had positive influences with my Mom and Grandma both being teachers. In 2017 I heard a presentation about disability leadership and was inspired to begin my advocacy journey. The advocacy seed is a concept I developed to share my experience with advocacy and my growth as a leader.</p> <p><b>GUIDED GROWTH</b></p> <p>My seed has been watered and fertilized by many advocates in my life, as well as the support of the disability community. This began to help shape who I am today.</p> <p>“ The journey began with a single seed of awareness, nurtured by early personal experiences. ”</p> | <p><b>SELF-ADVOCACY</b></p> <p>I Presented “What Do You See When You Look At Me?” at New Mexico conferences. Faced with limited meaningful employment, I explored alternatives and collaborated with my team to promote Customized Employment in New Mexico.</p> <p><b>SELF-EDUCATION</b></p> <p>I attended various workshops and trainings to learn more about legislation around New Mexico, improve my advocacy skills, and teach others to advocate.</p> <p>“ Self-education provided essential nutrients, while early self-advocacy strengthened my emerging voice. ”</p> | <p><b>EXPANDING KNOWLEDGE</b></p> <p>I continued to attend workshops and trainings, including the Advocating Change Together (ACT) online multi-day workshop. This workshop supports the leadership of people with disabilities to fight ableism and build inclusive communities.</p> <p><b>TEACHING OTHERS</b></p> <p>I trained and moderated in a 40 hour virtual peer specialist training to self-advocates in Alabama. I also helped introduce Customized Employment at a Self-Advocacy Conference.</p> <p>“ As knowledge deepened, the desire to share branched out. Early community involvement provided support for growth. ”</p> | <p><b>COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT</b></p> <p>I was part of the team who helped create The Office of Special Education and selected the Ombud.</p> <p>I hosted exhibit tables at the New Mexico Roundhouse during Disability Rights Awareness Day (DRAD) events.</p> <p><b>LEADERSHIP ROLES</b></p> <p>Vice-President of People First of Albuquerque; President of New Mexico Allies for Advocacy, Inc.; Appointed member of the New Mexico Developmental Disabilities Council.</p> <p>“ Years of dedicated effort created a strong foundation for leadership and impact within the disability community. ”</p> | <p><b>INSPIRING IMPACT</b></p> <p>The support of the disability community as a whole has not only shaped who I am, but allows me to water and shape others through my own advocacy. As each person reaches out and shares their success, others become inspired to plant and water their own seed, which grows in their life and becomes a sturdy tree.</p> <p><b>GARDENER ROLES</b></p> <p>Having the right tools, conditions, and environment help grow a big, beautiful, blossoming, fruit-bearing Advocacy Tree. Many gardeners help shape, tend, and care for my tree.</p> <p>“ The fruits of advocacy are now being harvested – empowered individuals and a story of leadership that inspires future growth. ”</p> |
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