

**Topics: Recent topics in public health in Japan 2025**

## &lt; Review &gt;

**Current situation and perspective regarding vocational rehabilitation and employment support in Japan**KURACHI Nobuaki<sup>1)</sup>, HARUNA Yuichiro<sup>2)</sup>, MARUTANI Miki<sup>3)</sup><sup>1)</sup>Employment Support Center for people with disability WISDOM<sup>2)</sup>Department of Study, Japan Organization for Employment of the Elderly, Person with Disabilities and Seekers<sup>3)</sup>Department of Health Promotion, National Institute of Public Health**Abstract**

In 2008, the International Labor Organization reported on decent work (i.e., work that is fulfilling and humane), which has been promoted by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare in Japan. To support the employment of people with disabilities (PWDs), a new system and training program will be launched. We would like to provide an opportunity for mutual study, through dissemination to the world, the status and prospects of employment support for PWDs in Japan, including human resource development.

In Japan, a number of employment support measures have been implemented for PWDs, based on the Act on Employment Promotion of PWDs, including the “Employment rate system for PWDs” and “Payment system for employment of PWDs,” “Measures to reduce economic burden,” and “Vocational rehabilitation.” Although the various systems have been successful, and work opportunities for PWDs have been expanding, there are some types of employment that deviate from the philosophy of employment of PWDs, such as proxy companies. In addition, there are also PWDs who are unable to transition from welfare to employment due to “protection.” In addition, the “market-principle” was introduced, which emphasized efficiency without consideration of the PWDs’ wishes, since the Law to Support the Independence of PWDs was launched. Employment Choice Support (ECS) in 2025, based on the Act on Comprehensive Support for PWDs may represent an opportunity to solve these problems. Supporters obtain correct knowledge and improve their skills by “Basic Training” or training for ECS supporters.

From FY2025, both welfare and employment supporters are required to complete “basic training,” which enables participants to acquire basic knowledge and skills, including the purpose and philosophy of employment support, pre-employment and post-employment support, support for companies, and cooperation with related organizations. Due to the diversity of supporters in the employment and welfare fields, hierarchical training is provided according to expertise and years of experience.

After October 2025, prior to using welfare employment, PWDs are generally required to use ECS, which enables them to make self-selection in cooperation with professional supporters. The method of employment assessment, which is a core ECS skill, assumes knowledge and skills such as basic principles, the employment support process, and cooperation with related organizations. Supporters engaged in ECS are required to complete basic training, followed by an ECS Supporter Training Course.

While views on disabilities and support differ worldwide, it is necessary to create a society where all persons can work with authenticity, irrespective of age or region. There is a need to cultivate human resource development that supports such authenticity.

**keywords:** People with disabilities, employment support, vocational rehabilitation, human resource development

(accepted for publication, December 11, 2024)

---

Corresponding author: MARUTANI Miki  
tel: +81-48-458-6154

## I. Introduction

Why and for what purpose do we work? In Japan, there used to be a time when loyalty to the company was nurtured and employees' families were involved, but nowadays, individual values and lives are more important, and diverse work perspectives can be seen [1]. A consideration of various viewpoints on labor in Japan shows that there are favorable views of labor, such as the joy of working by becoming a full-fledged worker in the community, self-realization and growth, and the meaning of work as a way of life [2]. On the other hand, some view that labor does not necessarily have to be a means of self-realization, since people can grow outside of work [2]. Thus, we work from a wide variety of perspectives.

Regardless of your view of work, everyone has the right to work, and in 2008 the International Labor Organization (ILO) reported on decent work, i.e., work that is worthwhile and humane [3]. Therein, four strategies were set forth: job creation, social protection, social dialogue, and guaranteeing rights at work. Decent work was adopted by the United Nations in 2015 and is enshrined in the Sustainable Development Goals. The preamble to the SDGs pledges to "leave no one behind," meaning that PWDs (PWDs) will be included [4]. Furthermore, the right of PWDs to work is also stated in the objectives of the ILO [3]. The purpose of the law is "to enable PWDs to obtain and maintain suitable employment and to improve in such employment, thereby promoting the integration or reintegration of PWDs in society."

In Japan, decent work is promoted through organization into four categories: opportunities for work, guarantee of rights at work, balancing family and professional life, and fair treatment [5]. Employment of PWDs in Japan began with enactment of the Law for Employment Promotion of Persons with Physical Disabilities in 1960. Later, in 1987, the "Law Concerning Employment Promotion, etc. of PWDs" was extended to all PWDs, and has undergone amendments up to the present. In July 2024, the "Headquarters for the Promotion of Measures toward the Realization of a Coexisting Society without Prejudice and Discrimination against PWDs" was established, and efforts are being strengthened to realize the goal of employment of PWDs.

To realize a coexisting society, it is also necessary to develop human resources to support the employment of PWDs. Employment support for PWDs in Japan began with job coaches and various training programs. In order to ensure that everyone will be able to obtain the job they want, a partial amendment made in December 2022 to the "Law for Comprehensive Support for the Daily Life and Social Life of PWDs" is also launching new human resource

development initiatives aimed at providing detailed employment support, in line with the wishes and abilities of PWDs themselves [6].

Accordingly, in this paper, we would like to present the status and prospects of employment support and human resource development for PWDs in Japan to the world, and have the opportunity to exchange information with readers worldwide.

## II. History of the Vocational Rehabilitation System in Japan

In Japan, there are three employment support measures for PWDs: the "Employment rate system for PWDs (ERS-PWDs)" and the "Payment system for employment of PWDs (PSE-PWDs)" based on the Act on Employment Promotion of PWDs (AEP-PWDs); "Measures to reduce economic burden" on companies and PWDs; and "Vocational rehabilitation (VR)." The "Act on Prohibition of Discrimination and the Provision of Reasonable Accommodation" enhances the quality of employment. In addition, there is also "welfare employment" under the Act on Comprehensive Support for PWDs (ACSPWDs). This paper describes the framework and history of ERS-PWDs, PSE-PWDs, and VR.

### 1. Outline and History of ERS-PWDs

ERS-PWDs is characterized by a quota employment system (QES). EP (Employment Promotion) for the physically disabled was enacted in 1960, requiring employment of the physically disabled at 1.1% for manual labor office work and 1.3% for clerical work. In 1968, employment at all offices became required, at 1.3%.

In 1976, the ERS for the physically disabled was established, making employment of the physically disabled mandatory, and the system became a QES. In addition, PSE-PWDs was established, and a double-counting system, etc. was also established, whereby the severely physically disabled (Level 1-2 of the Physical Disability Certificate) are counted as two employees. The statutory employment rate was set by government ordinance at 1.5%, and was to be reviewed every five years.

Since there are some industries where it is not appropriate to apply the statutory employment rate, an exclusion ratio system was established, whereby an exclusion ratio is set for each specific industry and the number of workers corresponding to the exclusion ratio is deducted from the number of regular workers.

In 1987, the law was expanded to intellectual (ID) and mental disabilities (MD), and amended for AEP-PWDs. A QES remained only for physically disabled. However, the employment of an ID was deemed to be the employment of

a physically disabled person, and became subject to the quota system. Furthermore, the statutory employment rate for the private sector has been raised from 1.5% to 1.6%, since 1988.

In 1997, an amendment made IDs subject to the ERS. A formula for calculating statutory employment uses as its denominator the number of all employed persons, regardless of disability, plus all who are registered as job seekers. The statutory employment is then calculated using the total number of employed PWDs and registered job seeking PWDs as the numerator.

With the mandatory employment of IDs, the ERS increased from 1.6% to 1.8% for private companies, 2.1% for public finance corporations, public corporations, and other special corporations, 2.1% for national and local governments, and 2.0% for certain boards of education.

In 2002, the law was amended to allow employment of IDs, abolishing the exclusion rate system; however, it is currently maintained. In 2004 and 2010, the rate was reduced by 10 points, and in 2025 it will be reduced by another 10 points; however, a timetable has not yet been prepared for its abolition.

According to a 2005 amendment, when a company employs an MD from April 2006, that company is considered to have employed a physically or intellectually disabled person, and is subject to the ERS. However, the severe disability provision was rescinded, and all of these are considered to be non-severely disabled.

Non-severe PWDs who work 20 to 30 hours per week were not subject to the ERS; however, under the 2008 amendment, they can be counted as 0.5 as short-time workers.

The 2013 amendment made it mandatory to employ MDs, and the legal employment rate for the private sector rose from 1.8% to 2.0%, then to 2.2% in 2018, 2.3% in 2021, and 2.5% in 2024, and is set to be 2.7% in 2026. Currently, the focus is on calculation of the employment rate of persons with intractable diseases.

## 2. PSE-PWDs

To eliminate unfairness between companies that employ PWDs and those that do not, and to promote ERS-PWDs, PSE-PWDs has been established to adjust the financial burden through joint contributions by private employers. This system consists of: 1) Penalties for companies with  $\geq 101$  employees that have not achieved the employment rate (50,000 yen/month/person); 2) An allowance for companies with  $\geq 101$  employees that employ PWDs in excess of the employment rate (29,000 yen/month/person) and an allowance for companies with  $\leq 100$  employees that employ PWDs in excess of a certain rate (21,000 yen/month/person); and 3) Subsidies for the establishment and main-

tenance of work facilities, and for the assistants to employ PWDs, etc.

Since the Penalties are not a fine, the company is not relieved of its obligation to employ PWDs, and it is an effective method for motivating companies to hire PWDs.

## 3. Reducing the financial burden on companies

Some PWDs require assistance and time to become accustomed to their work and be productive. Employing PWDs may place an economic burden on companies, such as facilities and equipment or human resources. In particular, employing severe PEDs often places a financial burden on firms. To promote the employment of PWDs, measures to reduce the economic burden on companies are necessary.

There are two major measures to reduce the economic burden. The first is the provision of employment adjustment payments and subsidies described in the previous section [7], while the second is public funding such as a “subsidy for employment development of specific job seekers,” which is provided to employment insurance-insured companies that hire PWDs through referrals from the Public Employment Security Office (PESO), etc. Depending on the size of the company or the degree of disability, etc., the program provides companies with a stipend of between 600,000 and 2.4 million yen for 1 or 1.5 years. In addition, there are also the “Trial Employment Subsidy” and the “Career Advancement Subsidy,” as well as tax incentives [8].

## 4. VR

Simply instructing companies to hire PWDs by making their employment mandatory or reducing the economic burden will not advance or stabilize the employment of PWDs. There is also VR consisting of counseling for PWDs and support for improving their vocational skills, as well as employment management support and workplace environment adjustments for companies.

VR is defined in ILO Convention 159, VR and Employment of PWDs (1983), as “VR is intended to enable a disabled person to secure, retain, and advance in suitable employment and thereby to further such person’s integration or reintegration into society.” [9] From this definition, VR is intended to support “finding a job in a general company,” “continuing employment,” and “improving the quality of working life.” The ILO’s Basic Principles for VR (1985) defines support as assessment (vocational evaluation), consultation (vocational guidance), vocational training, job placement, provision of work with special considerations (protective employment, including work environment adjustment), and follow-up after employment. [9]

Models of support for VR include the following. Although there is evidence that supported employment (SE) and

Individual Placement and Support are effective, the work readiness model in employment transition support offices remains the dominant model in Japan.

#### **(1) Model for selecting the right job**

One method of support involves assessing the PWDs' vocational abilities, determining their vocational aptitude, and providing job placement to help them find a job. While this model is effective for people with mild physical disabilities and PWDs who have the same abilities as people without disabilities, it is not suitable for moderate to severe PWDs, IDs, and MDs including developmental disabilities (DD), because they do not find suitable jobs.

#### **(2) Work Readiness Model**

In this model, PWDs mainly acquire the skills necessary for professional life in a facility prior to entering the job market, to restore confidence and self-esteem so that the PWDs can demonstrate their natural abilities. This helps to develop a working life rhythm and removes anxiety about finding a job. However, it is not effective if PWDs adapt to the facility, reduce their motivation to work, or have cognitive impairments.

#### **(3) SE**

In SE, no work preparation program is conducted in a facility. Instead, an employment contract is signed, after which a supporter helps the PWD to adapt to the work, employees, rules, and culture of the workplace. It is effective for those with cognitive impairments, and can also provide support to companies (other employees) to improve the work environment. However, it is necessary for supporters to make a large effort and have advanced skills.

#### **(4) IPS**

This system provides SE for severe MD, based on eight basic principles: 1) anyone who wishes to receive it is eligible; 2) the system involves a team of employment supporters and health professionals; 3) the aim is to obtain work in a general company, even as a short time worker; 4) a job search is conducted based on the PWD's interests and choices; 5) training in a facility is minimized, and a workplace is found quickly; 6) continuous support is provided after employment; 7) financial support is provided; and, 8) based on the PWD's wishes, supporters provide assistance regarding the relationship between the PWD and the employer.

This type of support is provided by labor-related VR professionals and welfare service providers in the following agencies.

##### **a. PESO**

PESO has a Disability Desk, which handles job registration, job placement, and post-employment workplace adjustment guidance for PWDs. PESO is a national agency by ESL, and while general clerks provide services, specialized

staff for MDs or DDs, as well as sign language cooperators are assigned on a part-time basis.

##### **b. Regional VR Centers (RVRCs)**

RVRCs in all prefectures provide specialized VR for PWDs, in close collaboration with PESO. RVRCs provide vocational assessment, vocational guidance, vocational training, and workplace adaptation assistance, and also provide employers with analyses of employment management issues, expert advice, and other support. RVRCs have vocational counselors and part-time support staff such as job coaches. Recently, RVRCs have focused on fostering a VR network in the region, and providing advice and assistance to local institutions.

##### **c. Employment and living support centers for PWDs (ELSC)**

To help PWDs become self-reliant in their professional lives, ELSCs provide integrated support for employment and daily life in the regions, in cooperation with related organizations concerned with employment, health, welfare, and education. As of April 2024, a total of 337 locations have been established. In addition, some RVRCs established by local governments provide similar support.

##### **d. Employment transition support (ETS), Employment settlement support (ESS), and Employment choice support (ECS)**

These are based on the ACSPWDs. ETS provides PWDs with support for transitioning to general employment, including training at the ETS and companies, finding workplaces suited to their aptitudes, and helping them settle into their workplaces. While services are provided in day-care style, in principle, services can be combined with visits to workplaces depending on the progress of the individual support plan. The standard term is 24 months. As of 2020, there were 2,934 ETSSs, although the number has recently been on a gradual downward trend. ESS provides liaison and coordination with companies, and support regarding issues for up to three years to those who have been employed in general employment after ETS, to help them continue their employment. ECS is being launched from 2025, and provides support to enable PWDs to choose between general employment and welfare services, based on an assessment of their ability and aptitude for employment, along with other considerations.

##### **e. Vocational Skills Development Centers (VSDCs)**

VSDCs (19 Centers nationwide) were established under the Vocational Skills Development Promotion Act, and provide training to acquire specialized knowledge and skills in IT, machinery, OA business, electronics, cooking and cleaning services, and other specific occupations. There are a total of 28 VSDCs that offer training courses for PWDs. Although the main training provided concerns the specialized skills of the target occupation, the training curriculum

for MDs and IDs includes a work readiness program.

f. Job coaches

Job coaches visit the workplace to provide direct and professional support to PWDs and business establishment personnel, to help them adjust to the workplace, either before or after employment. There are three types of job coaches after training: placement-type job coaches at regional VR centers, visiting-type job coaches at welfare corporations, and company-employed job coaches.

### III. Expansion of workplaces for PWDs and new challenges

#### 1. Increase of PWDs working in companies

Japan's system for promoting the employment of PWDs imposes an obligation to employ PWDs on companies, and PSE-PWDs eliminates inequalities and provides financial support to companies, while VR provides human resources support. Meanwhile, ETS of ACSPWDs provides human support.

As a result, job placement by PESO for PWDs [10] achieved 110,000 placements in FY2023, an increase of more than 30,000 from a decade ago. In addition, according to the 2023 Employment Status Survey of PWDs [11], 642,000 PWDs work in companies with 43.5 or more employees. Given that the same survey 10 years ago reported 409,000, this represents surprising growth. The actual employment rate in the private sector was 2.33%, achieving the legally mandated employment rate of 2.3%. Factors that are responsible for the steadily expansion of workplaces for PWDs should include: the government's guidance on achieving the mandated employment rate, an increase in the number of employment support organizations, an improved awareness of legal compliance by companies, and an increase in the number of PWDs who wish to work.

#### 2. Employment quality issues

Despite the 110,000 new jobs during the year, the survey on the employment status of PWDs revealed issues, with an increase of only 28,000 jobs. This means that there is a substantial turnover rate, and there is a concern that companies may be so focused on achieving the employment rate for PWDs that they are not paying attention to creating an environment where employees with disabilities can continue to work.

A sign of this issue is the rise of proxy companies that provide employment services for PWDs (proxy companies). Proxy companies work to achieve the employment rate for PWDs, on behalf of client companies. According to a survey by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare (MHLW), there were 23 proxy companies in 125 areas, employing

more than 6,500 PWDs. As of March 2023, more than 1,000 companies use proxy companies, and more companies are expected to use them in the future [12]. Typical proxy companies include agricultural work in plastic greenhouses and light office work in satellite offices. A company contracts with a proxy company to recruit employees with disabilities, sign employment contracts with the company (not the proxy company), prepare them for work, and manage their employment. The company simply pays the proxy companies and PWDs, and the employment is counted toward a company's actual employment rate.

This issue is complicated. The advantage for the companies is that they can achieve the legal employment rate while only assuming a financial burden, and do not have to manage employment. However, this would deviate from the "social inclusion" philosophy of AEP-PWDs, which is that employees with and without disabilities work together to make up society.

Furthermore, most proxy companies provide only work that is far from decent work. PWDs are paid a certain amount of salary in a situation that is far removed from the principles of AEP-PWDs, which are "development and improvement of vocational abilities," "fair evaluation of abilities and provision of appropriate employment opportunities," and "appropriate employment management."

Work means not only receiving an income, but also having the realization that one can be of service to society. In this way, PWDs can regain the self-esteem and self-affirmation that they have lost due to their disability. PWDs regain these more strongly when they work in the same workplaces as non-handicapped persons, and that is the aim of the employment of PWDs, as social inclusion. The essence of employment for PWDs is to realize that employed PWDs can work alongside persons without disabilities, demonstrate their abilities to the fullest, and earn wages by contributing to the company and society. Unfortunately, proxy companies cannot accomplish this. While the quantity of jobs may be achieved, a major problem regarding the quality of jobs is occurring.

Future measures could include not counting as employment of PWDs those cases, like the use of proxy companies, which deviate from the principles of employment of PWDs and do not involve quality of employment. Evaluation of the employment of PWDs should not be performed only via the legal employment rate, but also by focusing on the quality of employment. Otherwise, Japan's philosophy of employment of PWDs will be fundamentally compromised.

#### 3. PWDs who are unable to transition from welfare to employment

In September 2022, the UN Committee on the Rights



of PWDs issued recommendations to the Japanese government [13]. These state that, “PWDs are segregated into protected workplaces and employment-related social services, with low wages and limited opportunities to transition into the open labor market” and that “efforts to accelerate transitions should be strengthened.” Similar issues are also being addressed by the MHLW’s Labor Policy Council’s Subcommittee on Employment of PWDs and the Study Group on Strengthening Cooperation between Employment and Welfare Policies for PWDs (SCEW-PWDs).

This is the problem of PWDs who have the potential to work being kept in welfare offices. The concern is that PWDs who are convinced (or made to believe) that they cannot work are staying behind, unable to take on the challenge of employment. The main underlying factor could be that supporters of welfare, education, and medical care assume, without evidence that “it is difficult for PWDs to work in a company,” and that the priority is to stabilize the management of welfare and medical institutions.

VR continues to struggle between “protection” and “support for self-reliance.” Protection means paternalism and warm-heartedness. However, it can also mean that “PWDs do not have the power to judge and decide, so supporters make decisions without asking the PWDs’ intentions, in the best interest of the person.” Specifically, this process involves the supporter assessing the abilities of the PWDs, determining the direction of the PWDs’ career path, providing training, finding a job based on the PWDs’ aptitude, and negotiating with employers to find employment. If the PWDs “cannot find work,” this is the same as keeping them in welfare employment. This protectionist, donor-driven support still comprises the mainstream.

A new philosophy, the “market-principle,” has been introduced since the Law to Support the Independence of PWDs came into effect (2006). Until that time, VR and other welfare for PWDs had been promoted based on the concept of “public responsibility and non-profit.” The aim of the reform was to address the issue that “protection” had prevented the transition from welfare institutions to employment, and to enhance the independence of PWDs. The principle of competition was introduced with the aim of making support institutions, which were unwilling to move away from protectionism, move toward independence-support through market principles; otherwise, their adoption would decline. The law allows not only non-profit organizations (NPO), but also for-profit organizations to establish disability welfare service organizations, and is intended to weed out protectionist support organizations that are not chosen by PWDs.

However, adoption of the market principle has also overturned the “non-profit” philosophy. Since for-profit organizations have been allowed to enter the market, ETS has

been occupied by large for-profit companies. As a free-market allows employment-related businesses to be established, securing PWDs has become imperative for business operation, including for NPOs. ESSs do not support PWDs’ graduation, and ETSs do not support PWDs until the two-year deadline has passed. Accordingly, not only for-profit corporations, but also NPOs have made generating revenue their primary goal.

What “Protection” and the “Market-principle” have in common is emphasizing efficiency and the absence of PWDs. Supporter-driven VR values efficiency and makes PWDs stay in welfare employment without confirming the PWDs’ wishes. A quick transition to employment is prioritized, and the trial-and-error experiences of PWDs are ignored. Instead, the program should value the independence of PWDs, respect and support their self-determination, guarantee them opportunities to challenge themselves, and proceed through trial-and-error in a partnership, based on the principle of VR. The VR profession will solve these problems by implementing a philosophy-based practice.

#### 4. Expectations for ECS

The study group on SCEW-PWDs by MHLW addressed the issue of PWDs who cannot transition from welfare to employment, and the importance of assessment was confirmed. The report indicated that “the basic purpose of assessment is to achieve general employment based on a full consideration of PWDs’ needs [6].” Welfare, education, and medical personnel are required to be aware of the actual conditions of PWDs who are working in companies, to elicit the wishes of the PWDs concerning work, and to correctly conduct employment assessments, which are carried out to provide the necessary services and support to achieve general employment.

The ECS in 2025, based on ACSPWDs may be the last opportunity to solve these problems. The specific aims of ECS are as follows:

- Utilize work scenes, etc. to support each user’s self-understanding by organizing their individual strengths and characteristics, along with challenges for moving in their desired direction, etc., in cooperation with both the individual and their professional supporters.
- Work with each individual on how and where to work to achieve a work style that suits him or her, improve issues at work, etc.
- As a result of this process, to support the individual in making choices and decisions about his or her career path, including employment in a general business or the use of employment-related disability welfare services. (Therefore, ECS does not determine whether or not a person can work, nor does it sort out which work-related

disability welfare services to use.)

- Provide information, advice, guidance, etc. on employment cases and social resources related to employment support in the individual's region, both before and after provision of support, to broaden the individual's options and help them make an appropriate choice. Assessment results should be shared with the individual, family members, and related parties so that they can be used for subsequent employment support, etc.
- In order to ensure that the assessment results are used effectively in employment support after the use of ECS, etc., ECS offices shall cooperate and liaise with employment support agencies such as planning consultation support offices, municipalities, and PESO.

Such support makes many PWDs find hope and choose their work in general business. It is necessary for supporters to have correct knowledge and improve their level of ability by attending the newly-introduced "Basic Training," which is common to both welfare and employment supporters, or training for ECS supporters.

## 5. Conclusion

Although workplaces for PWDs are expanding rapidly, the pace of this expansion does not closely reflect companies' readiness to accept PWDs and their understanding of the concept of employment of PWDs. Therefore, employment of PWDs is progressing in an awkward manner. Many PWDs still have not been given the opportunity to challenge themselves to participate in the workforce. Going forward, it will be increasingly important to advance the employment of PWDs based on improvements in the quality of employment, and to support PWDs who have not yet transitioned to employment by eliciting their needs and connecting them with employers. Support professionals are expected to overcome protectionism and market principles, and practice PWDs-centered support.

## IV. Regional support system and human resource development related to employment support for PWDs

As indicated in the previous section, two paradigms co-exist for employment support policies for PWDs in Japan: one based on employment measures and a second based on welfare measures. Employment support for PWDs through VR services based on employment policies has been following the principle of "supported employment," and has been achieving results in general employment for people with intellectual disabilities, etc. since the 2000s. On the other hand, employment support for PWDs based on welfare

measures has developed protective employment outside of a labor contract (Type B labor support business) as well as employment with a labor contract, despite being a welfare service (Type A employment support for continuous employment).

Recently, in our country, discussions at the national level among government officials, experts, and supporters in both the employment and welfare sectors have been undertaken, and an examination was conducted to strengthen the linkage between these two paradigms in employment support. The result, a common "basic training" course for supporters who are involved in employment support in both the employment and welfare sectors, is to be initiated from April 2025. In addition, PWDs who wish to use employment-based welfare services will receive "support for their employment options" based on an employment assessment, in the employment policy from October 2025, in principle.

### 1. Common "Basic Training" for welfare and employment supporters

To secure human resources in both the welfare and employment fields, at a level that enables them to begin providing basic support to PWDs and companies, supporters involved in employment support in both fields are required to receive common "basic training," from FY2025. Based on the principle of "supported employment" in the employment policies, this program enables participants to acquire basic knowledge and skills, such as the purpose and philosophy of employment support, pre-employment and post-employment support, support for companies, and cooperation with related organizations, through 900 hours of training.

#### (1) Background leading to the creation of "basic training"

From November 2020 to June 2021, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare established the "Study Group on Strengthening Coordination of Employment and Welfare Policies for PWDs." The "Working Group on Developing and Securing Human Resources to Support the Employment of PWDs" discussed this issue, and a summary of their report (compiled on June 8, 2021) is as follows.

a. Issues related to the development and securing of human resources to support employment for PWDs

Inadequacy of basic knowledge and skills in both fields, for personnel involved in employment support for PWDs in the respective fields of employment and welfare

- Limited opportunities for practical training to develop professional personnel with the knowledge and skills required for the role of each employment agency
- Increasing difficulty providing seamless support for welfare and employment, as well as a shortage of professional human resources, both in terms of quantity

and quality

b. Directions for Developing and Securing Human Resources to Support Employment for PWDs

- Establish basic training that imparts basic knowledge and other skills in both the employment and welfare sectors
- Establish a hierarchical training system for the advancement of professional personnel
- Secure professional human resources by increasing social recognition, and improving the social and economic status of professional human resources

**(2) Specific directions for basic training for employment support workers in both the employment and welfare sectors**

The MHLW further conducted a “Working Group on the Construction of Training Programs to Impart Basic Knowledge and Skills Across the Employment and Welfare Sectors” from September to December 2021. In this context, the specific content and target audience for future basic training were clarified.

a. Specific knowledge and skills that need to be acquired

The Japan Organization for Employment of the Elderly, PWDs, and Job Seekers (JEED), an independent administrative agency under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare and in charge of VR training and other employment policies, has long conducted basic training for employment support for PWDs, for those in charge of such support in welfare, educational, medical, and other related organizations, in order to help them acquire the basic knowledge and skills necessary to provide employment support for PWDs. It was decided that the curriculum of the new basic training should include content that will enable acquisition of the following knowledge and skills.

- The purpose of employment assistance, and the philosophy and ethics of employment and welfare of PWDs, etc.
- Transition to general employment; transition from employment to welfare
- Knowledge and skills in post-placement employment management and retention support
- Knowledge and skills to support companies (knowledge and skills to promote the use of local resources in companies and support job carving; how to consider the content of providing reasonable accommodation and how to coordinate with companies; knowledge on considerations regarding mental health for company personnel, etc.)
- Knowledge and skills in working with PESO and other VR providers
- Knowledge necessary to support PWDs through life changes, according to life stage (e.g., adolescent psychology, career consulting, etc.)

- Knowledge and skills to help promote an understanding of employment of PWDs within companies

- Knowledge pertaining to ICT tools for employment of PWDs

b. Points to keep in mind according to the expansion of the training target audience

It should be noted that the current basic training program for employment support is mainly for personnel in the welfare sector, with a large proportion of teaching employment support for general employment. Therefore, the new basic training should also include perspectives on how to support the daily lives of PWDs working in companies, and how to link employment to welfare. In addition, it is necessary to enable them to understand the difference between welfare work and general employment, and to learn what will be required of them when they actually work in a company.

**(3) Specifics of basic training common to employment and welfare**

In response to these developments, in January 2022 the Subcommittee on Employment of PWDs of the Labor Policy Council clarified the specifics of the basic training program.

a. Image of human resources after attending the training course

The goal is for trainees to acquire a certain level of cross-sectional knowledge in the fields of employment and welfare, etc. The ideal trainee should be a person who is capable of providing basic support to PWDs and companies.

b. Duration and methods of training

The duration of the basic training should not exceed 3 days (approximately 900 minutes or less), and online training can be used for part of the training.

c. Subjects of the training

For the time being, those who should be required to attend basic training are the following four types: supporters at ETS, supporters at ESS, and supporters at ELSC.

d. Training Institutions

Basic training will be conducted by JEED, which has traditionally overseen training in the employment field, including basic training for employment support, training for persons in charge of employment support at ELSC, and training for workplace adjustment assistance personnel. In addition, private institutions will also be utilized. However, from the perspective of ensuring quality, the first step will be to select an institution that is designated by the Minister of Health, Labor and Welfare to provide training for workplace adjustment assistance personnel.

e. Basic and hierarchical training

Based on the diversity of the supporters involved in employment support for PWDs in the employment and welfare fields, hierarchical training will be provided based on basic training, according to expertise and years of experience



#### (4) Content of basic training

Based on the above, the specific content of the “basic training” was discussed at JEED from June 2022 to February 2023, by the “Working Group on Preparation of the Curriculum and Teaching Materials for Training in the Development of VR Specialists.” Since the scope of the welfare fields that are to be enhanced through the basic training for employment support covers a wide range of areas, knowledge, etc., content that is particularly necessary for employment support was selected, while taking into consideration the zero-step nature of the training program. In addition, while the Basic Employment Support Training is intended for employees in charge of employment support at welfare and medical institutions, etc., and the content and methods of the exercises and group work, etc. are designed based on the target audience, the Basic Training is expected to be attended by people who belong to companies. Therefore, consideration should be given to making it easier for those who belong to companies to participate in the basic training.

The basic training lasts a total of 900 minutes, and imparts knowledge and skills regarding both the welfare and employment aspects of the job, with the aim of raising the level of the participants from a zero-knowledge level, to that of personnel who are capable of initiating basic support for individuals with disabilities, both individually and for their companies. The specific curriculum for this program is shown in Table 1, which involves a combination of on-demand training and on-the-job training.

The respective support organizations will apply for the course through an electronic application system, attend

the on-demand training within 4 weeks in principle, attend a one- or two-day group training session at the Regional Vocational Center for PWDs, and issue a certificate of completion.

## 2. Employment choice support (ECS) (Figure1)

ECS enables PWDs to engage in self-selection, in cooperation with professional supporters regarding the use of general employment, employment-related welfare services, etc., by introducing employment assessment in VR services via employment policies for users and applicants of employment-related welfare services through welfare policies. This system is to be launched in stages from 2025.

### (1) Background of ECS

The following are some of the current conditions and issues that led to the need for ECS. There is no established method to objectively evaluate the employment abilities and aptitudes of PWDs who wish to use employment-related welfare services for PWDs, and to utilize them in their employment choices and specific support content. As a result, neither the PWDs nor those who support them have an adequate understanding of their employment abilities and potential for general employment, which does not lead to the provision of appropriate services, etc. Therefore, once a person starts using Type A or Type B continuous employment support, it is easy for them to become fixed in that form of support. This means that the presence of a supporter who stands in the PWD's shoes and encourages them to take the next step has a large influence on their professional life.

### (2) Aim of ECS

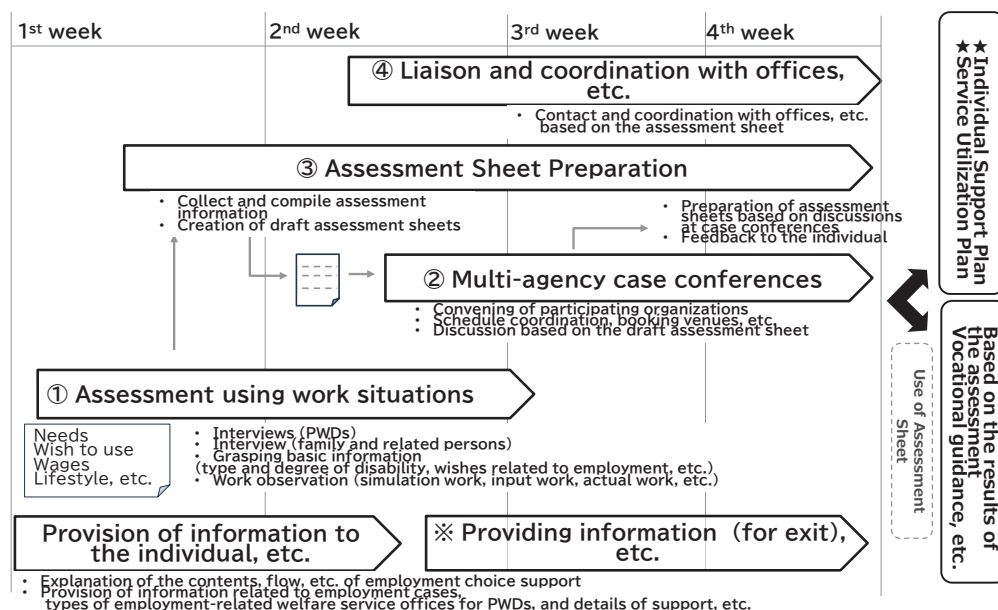


Figure1: Employment Choice Support flow ( image )

The purpose of ECS is to support PWDs who have the ability and hope to engage in work in thinking about their own work style (and to provide opportunities for such reflection), and to provide PWDs who have improved their knowledge and ability to work while using continuous employment support with appropriate opportunities to use support for a transition to employment or to enter general employment, while also focusing on their own wishes. In addition, the program provides appropriate opportunities for PWDs who have improved their knowledge and abilities for employment while using support for continuous employment to choose to use transitional support for employment or to work in the general employment market.

### (3) Subject of ECS

In the past, when people with disabilities first used employment-related welfare services, they tended to be locked into protective employment or welfare employment at close to minimum wage, without being provided with sufficient employment assessment or information regarding their employment potential. Thus, in principle, users of these employment-related welfare services are first targeted for ECS.

The target population for support for employment choice comprises those who intend to use support for employment transition or continuous employment support, and those who are currently using support for employment transition or continuous employment support, with the scope of support scheduled to be expanded in stages. After October 2025, as a general rule, before applying to use Type B support for continuous employment, which is protective employment, an applicant is required to use support for choice of employment. From April 2027, those who intend to use Type A support for continuous employment, a new form of employment with welfare significance, and those who intend to use Type A support for transition to employment beyond the standard period of use will, in principle also use support for choice of employment. In principle, those who are judged by the labor transition support office to have a clear possibility of finding employment, such as those who already have concrete plans for general employment, including interviews and practical training at work, are not required to use ECS.

### (4) Effects of ECS

- By assigning personnel who have completed specialized training in assessment, it is possible to receive employment assistance based on high quality assessments.
- It is possible to promote self-understanding by conducting an assessment with the PWD, to organize his/her employment abilities, aptitudes, needs, strengths, occupational challenges, and environmental factors that

facilitate the ability to demonstrate his/her individual strengths, as well as support and considerations for employment.

- Based on the contents organized in cooperation with PWDs and information on local companies, etc., and by cooperating with related organizations, it is possible for the PWDs to select a more appropriate career path. In addition, while using Type A and Type B continuous employment support, the PWDs can receive support for choosing employment according to his/her wishes, enabling him/her to make choices according to changes in employment needs, abilities, etc.

### (5) Challenges for ECS in implementing agents and training for supporters

The employment assessment, which is the core of ECS, is based on the paradigm of supported employment in employment policies. On the other hand, since ECS itself is within the framework of welfare policies, and the PWDs receiving support themselves belong to the welfare sector, the standards for institutions that implement such type of support, and the training of support personnel are urgent issues.

The criteria for agents that can provide ECS include support for ETS, support for continuous employment, ELSCs, and employment support centers established by local governments, all of which provide employment support with the goal of general employment and have a certain track record of employment. Such companies are also required to be able to provide information on employment support in the local community. It is also required, for example, not to direct PWDs to the employment-based welfare services of its own corporation.

In addition, the method of employment assessment, which is a core support technique for ECS, assumes knowledge and skills regarding basic principles, the employment support process, and cooperation with related organizations, etc., which also overlap with the contents of the basic training described in (1). Few staff in charge of employment support in the welfare sector have a sufficient understanding of the method of employment assessment, which is a core support technique for ECS. Considering this situation, supporters engaged in ECS will be required to attend basic training starting in FY2025, followed by an ECS Supporter Training Course. However, until 2027, as a transitional measure, staff can become ECS Supporters by attending basic training or equivalent conventional training provided by JEED, etc., such as basic training for employment support or training for job coaches.

### (6) Basic Process and Flow of ECS

Those who wish to use employment-related welfare services must first apply for ECS, receive a grant decision,

and use ECS. Based on the results, they can be linked to ETS for general employment, support at PESO, etc. or, if necessary, to the use of Type A and Type B continuous employment support business establishments. However, it is important to provide sufficient information and consultation support to enable the PWD to choose employment based on his/her own wishes and aptitude, so that this process does not lead to a judgment of the possibility of general employment or assignment to welfare employment.

In principle, ECS is provided in one month, during which time the results of the assessment and discussions by the agencies are compiled on an assessment sheet, which is shared between the PWDs and the agencies, and used in subsequent employment support. During the first week of support for employment options, the PWD is provided with sufficient information on the possibility of employment options in accordance with his/her wishes, including not only employment-related welfare services, but also a variety of VR services for general employment. Situational assessment using work situations, etc. is initiated, interviews are conducted with the PWD and the agencies, basic information is obtained, and strengths and issues in work situations are clarified during the second week through simulated workplaces, work experience, and practical work training. In addition, the possibility of a wide range of employment options and support plans based on the PWD's aptitude and wishes are discussed in a multi-agency case conference involving not only welfare personnel but also PESO, psychiatric medical institutions, and businesspeople. In the third and fourth weeks, coordination of workplace training at actual companies for general employment through ETS, etc., or liaison and coordination for the use of welfare employment, feedback on issues for the PWD's employment, and sharing of support plans, etc. are conducted.

## V. Conclusion

This report has introduced employment support for PWDs in Japan and the training of support personnel. Approaches may vary widely from country to country, due to inherent differences in the way in which disability is perceived. Even within Japan, different regions perceive disability differently, with some regions accepting disability or illness as a blessing from a "nosari" viewpoint. There are also diverse ways of perceiving disability throughout the world. The Anangu people in Australia celebrate uniqueness, and accept the diversity and difference that is present within humanity rather than seeing impairments. The Māori community in New Zealand also report a need for disability to be viewed in a more positive and integrated fashion than is the case in Western scholarship. In Mexi-

co, persons with intellectual impairments are valued and respected members who are recognized for their contributions, rather than for their disabilities [14].

On the other hand, PWDs may be branded as a result of wrongdoing, and in countries that value face, they are commonly viewed as a shame to the whole family [15]. Sometimes, a PWD may imply a contamination of a family's biological roots and a lowering of the genetic value of the family and lineage [16].

In addition to traditional ways of viewing disability, various theories have emerged in recent years, such as neurodiversity. This is a concept that views the phenomenon of developmental disabilities as a "natural and normal variation of the human genome" rather than as a lack of ability or superiority, and has been adopted as a policy in Japan [17].

Although the perception of disability is likely to change with developments in medicine, economics, education, and other areas, we hope that everyone of every age and in every region will be able to say, "this is just normal, it is the way I am." This statement goes along with Authenticity. Authenticity refers to living obediently based on one's own intentions and feelings [18], or to be responsible for one's life choices and taking full responsibility for the consequences that come along with them [19]. Authenticity is the most central element of psychological well-being, and employees who demonstrate authenticity in the workplace are more productive, motivated, and enthusiastic.

We are currently developing an advanced training program to improve assessment skills in ECS. During the development of that training program, it was clarified that authenticity was a core aspect of the assessment [20]. We would like to work toward the implementation of this training program, with the aim of creating a society in which everyone can lead a working life that is unique to them.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article.

## References

- [1] Hendry J, edited. Understanding Japanese society 5th ed. Oxfordshire: Routledge; 2019.
- [2] 鈴木聡志, 所正文. 労働観が幸福感に与える影響. 立正大学心理学研究年報. 2016;7;85-94. Suzuki S, Tokoro M. [The study on effects that work ethic gives to sense of well-being.] The journal of psychology Rishso University. 2016;7;85-94. (in Japanese)
- [3] International Labor Organization. Convention C159 - Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Dis-

- abled Persons) Convention, 1983 (No. 159) [https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEX-PUB:12100:0::NO::P12100\\_INSTRUMENT\\_ID:312304](https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEX-PUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_INSTRUMENT_ID:312304) (accessed 2024-11-20)
- [4] United Nations. Employment, decent work for all and social protection. <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/employment-decent-work-all-and-social-protection> (accessed 2024-11-20)
- [5] 厚生労働省. デイセント・ワーク（働きがいのある人間らしい仕事）について. Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. [Decent work (Hatarakigai no aru ningen rashii shigoto ni tsuite.)] [https://www.mhlw.go.jp/seisakunitsuite/bunya/hokabunya/kokusai/ilo/decent\\_work.html](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/seisakunitsuite/bunya/hokabunya/kokusai/ilo/decent_work.html) (in Japanese) (accessed 2024-11-20)
- [6] 厚生労働省. 障害者雇用・福祉施策の連携強化に関する検討会」の報告書を公表します. Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. [Shogaisha koyo fukushi shisaku no renkei kyoka ni kansuru kentokai no hokokusho o kohyo shimasu] [https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/newpage\\_19137.html](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/newpage_19137.html) (in Japanese) (accessed 2024-11-20)
- [7] 独立行政法人高齢・障害・求職者雇用支援機構. 助成金. Japan Organization for Employment of the Elderly and Persons with Disabilities and Job Seekers. [Joseikin.] <https://www.jeed.go.jp/disability/subsidy/index.html> (in Japanese) (accessed 2024-11-20)
- [8] 厚生労働省. 事業主のための雇用関係助成金. Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. [Jigyonushi no tameno koyo kankei joseikin.] [https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/koyou\\_roudou/koyou/kyufukin/index.html](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/seisakunitsuite/bunya/koyou_roudou/koyou/kyufukin/index.html) (in Japanese) (accessed 2024-11-20)
- [9] 障害者保健福祉研究情報システム. 障害者の職業リハビリテーションの基本原則. [Disability information resources Basic Principles of Vocational Rehabilitation of the Disabled.] [https://www.dinf.ne.jp/doc/japanese/prdl/jsrd/rehab/r006/r006\\_002.html](https://www.dinf.ne.jp/doc/japanese/prdl/jsrd/rehab/r006/r006_002.html) (in Japanese) (accessed 2024-11-20)
- [10] 厚生労働省. 令和5年度ハローワークを通じた障害者の職業紹介状況などの取りまとめを公表します. Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. [Reiwa 5 nendo hello work o tsujita shogaisha no shokugyo Shokai jokyō nado no torimatome.] [https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/newpage\\_40951.html](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/newpage_40951.html) (in Japanese) (accessed 2024-11-20)
- [11] 厚生労働省. 令和5年障害者雇用状況の集計結果. Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. [Reiwa 5 nen shogaisha koyo jokyō no shukei kekka.] [https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/newpage\\_36946.html](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/newpage_36946.html) (accessed 2024-11-20)
- [12] 厚生労働省. 第128回労働政策審議会障害者雇用分科会 資料. Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare. [128th Labor Policy Council's Subcommittee on Employment of PWDs document.] [https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/newpage\\_32656.html](https://www.mhlw.go.jp/stf/newpage_32656.html) (in Japanese) (accessed 2024-11-20)
- [13] United Nations. Concluding observations on the initial report of Japan. Article 27. 57,58 <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g22/518/42/pdf/g2251842.pdf> (accessed 2024-11-20)
- [14] Velarde MR. Indigenous perspectives of disability. *Disability Studies Quarterly*. 2018;38(4). <https://dsq-ds.org/index.php/dsq/article/view/6114/5134> (accessed 2024-11-28)
- [15] Ilias K, Cornish K, Kummar AS, Park MSA, Golden KJ. Parenting stress and resilience in parents of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in Southeast Asia: A systematic review. *Frontiers in psychology*. 2018;9:280.
- [16] Chiu MY, Yang X, Wong FHT, Li JH, Li J. Caregiving of children with intellectual disabilities in China: an examination of affiliate stigma and the cultural thesis. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*. 2013;57(12): 1117-1129.
- [17] 経済産業省. “ニューロダイバーシティの推進について”. Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. [Neurodiversity no suishin ni tsuite.] <https://www.meti.go.jp/policy/economy/jinzai/diversity/neurodiversity/neurodiversity.html> (in Japanese) (accessed 2024-11-20)
- [18] Harter S. Authenticity. In: Snyder CR, Lopez SJ, edited. *Handbook of positive psychology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2002. p. 382–394.
- [19] Guignon C. Authenticity. *Philosophy Compass*. 2008;3(2):277–290.
- [20] Marutani M, Eguchi H, Kawajiri H, Yukawa K, Matsushige T, Takahashi K. Development of an innovative app and training for transition support staff to better support transition to employment of persons with disabilities. In: *The 39th Annual Pacific Rim International Conference on Disability and Diversity*; 2023 Feb 27-28; Honolulu, USA.

## <総説>

### 日本における障害者の就労支援の現状及び今後の展望

倉知延章<sup>1)</sup>, 春名由一郎<sup>2)</sup>, 丸谷美紀<sup>3)</sup>

<sup>1)</sup> 福岡IPS普及協会就労支援センターウィズダム

<sup>2)</sup> 独立行政法人高齢・障害・求職者雇用支援機構 障害者職業総合センター 研究部門 (社会的支援)

<sup>3)</sup> 国立保健医療科学院生涯健康研究部

#### 抄録

2008年に、ディーセントワーク、即ち働きがいのある人間らしい仕事は、国際労働機関により報告され、日本においても厚生労働省により推進されている。この実現に向けて、障害者の就労を支える人材の育成も必要となり、新たな制度と養成研修が開始される。この制度改正の時期に、日本における障害者就労支援施策の現状及び今後の展望を人材育成も含めて世界へ発信し、相互に研鑽する機会としたい。

日本の障害者就労支援施策は、障害者の雇用の促進等に関する法律を中心に「障害者雇用率制度」「障害者雇用納付金制度」「経済的負担の軽減施策」「職業リハビリテーション」がある。各種制度が功を奏し、障害者の働く場は広がり量的進展は見られた。一方で、代行ビジネスをはじめ障害者雇用の理念からはずれた雇用も見られる。また「保護主義」により福祉から雇用へ移行できない障害者も存在する。さらに障害者自立支援法施行以降、「市場原理」が導入され、障害者本人不在の効率性が重視された。これらの問題解決に向け、2025年に創設される就労選択支援事業が期待される。就労選択支援に関わる支援者は、基礎的研修や就労選択支援事業従事者研修を受講し、レベルアップを図る必要がある。

基礎的研修は2025年4月から開始され、雇用と福祉の両分野の就労支援に携わる支援者が受講する。内容は、就労支援の目的・理念、就職前から就職後の支援、対企業支援、関係機関の連携等の基礎的な知識・スキルを習得するものである。また、雇用と福祉で障害者就労支援に関わる支援者の多様性を踏まえ、基礎的研修をベースとして、各専門性と経験年数に応じた階層的研修を実施する。

さらに、2025年10月以降、就労系福祉サービスの利用を希望する障害者は原則「就労選択支援」を受ける。これは、障害者本人が一般就業、就労系福祉サービス等の利用について、専門支援者と協働して自己選択できるように支援する。就労選択支援の中核となる就労アセスメント手法は、基本的理念や就労支援プロセス、関係機関との連携等の知識・スキル等を前提とする。就労選択支援に従事する支援者は、基礎的研修を受講した上で、就労選択支援員養成研修で修得する。

以上は日本の障害者就労支援と人材育成だが、国により取り組み方や障害の捉え方は多様であろう。時代や地域を超えて誰もが自分らしく働ける社会を目指し、それを支える人材の育成が望まれる。

キーワード：障害者、就労支援、職業リハビリテーション、人材育成