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ABSTRACT

This manual includes articles that address many of the major issues affecting supported employment programs for individuals with severe disabilities. Articles discuss current trends in service delivery, the experiences of local community employment agencies, issues involved in funding supported employment, natural support implementation strategies, and transition from school to work. Specific issues and programs reviewed include: (1) results of the 1995 National Survey of Supported Employment Implementation; (2) conversion of segregated, facility-based programs to supported employment; (3) use of Social Security work incentives; (4) the Social Security Return to Work Initiative; (5) time limited and extended services funding; (6) the role of employment specialists within natural support programs; and (7) the results of consumer satisfaction interviews with supported employment participants. In the last section, articles on transition include a description of a comprehensive transition model designed to enhance employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities as they graduate from post-secondary settings; the importance of transition teams that actively work with students with disabilities to promote their success in postsecondary education; and the results of an analysis of transition plans for student with disabilities that was conducted across 24 school divisions in Virginia. (Each article contains references.) (CR)

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT RESEARCH:

EXPANDING COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR PERSONS WITH SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES

Edited by:

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Virginia Commonwealth University
Rehabilitation Research &Training Center
on Supported Employment

Supported Employment Research:

Expanding Competitive Employment Opportunities for Persons with Significant Disabilities

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June, 1997

Rehabilitation Research and Training Center
on Supported Employment
Virginia Commonwealth University

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INTRODUCTION
THE MYTHS AND REALITIES OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

By: John Kregel, Paul Wehman, & Michael West

In just a few short years, supported employment have evolved into a widespread, effective community-based employment alternative that has enabled many individuals with significant disabilities their first opportunity to obtain and maintain a real job in their local community. As a service delivery strategy that embodies the principles of individualized, community-based support services and consumer empowerment, supported employment has become the preferred employment alternative for over 140,000 individuals previously excluded from work opportunities.

The national supported employment initiative has grown rapidly over the past decade. The VCU national Survey of Supported Employment Implementation has tracked annual participation rates for individuals participating in supported employment since the initiation of the Title VI-C formula funding program within the 1986 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act. The results of this survey, fully described below, indicate that the number of individuals participating in supported employment has risen from less than 10,000 in FY 1986 to 140,000 in FY 1995. Nearly 3,700 local community agencies in all 50 states provide supported employment services.

As we approach the end of the twentieth century, a number of "truisms" regarding supported employment as a national service program have emerged. Many of these truisms have developed in the clear absence of empirical information derived from objective research. A few of these myths are listed below.

The supported employment movement has stagnated and growth in the program has slowed. More and more frequently, we are hearing that the supported employment initiative has lost much of momentum and that the program will have a difficult time expanding in the future. The national data on participation rates does not corroborate this view. As we report in this monograph, the number of participants in supported employment rose from 105,000 to 140,000 from FY93 to FY95 alone. Supported employment closures as a percentage of all vocational rehabilitation closures continues to slowly but steadily increase. Far from being a small, isolated program, supported employment currently serves four to five times the number of persons served through Projects with Industry, Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act programs, or other similar programs. Supported employment is a key component of the Rehabilitation Services Administration's efforts to promote meaningful, competitive employment outcomes for individuals with significant disabilities in integrated settings.

Supported employment is more expensive than other vocational alternatives for individuals with significant disabilities. It is often stated that supported employment costs more than vocational alternatives. For example, in terms of time limited funding, supported employment

closures cost more, on a per closure basis, than other vocational rehabilitation closures. In terms of extended services, regulatory restrictions often required supported employment extended services to be funded through state monies as opposed federal Medicaid monies that fund other types of day services for individuals with developmental disabilities. However, when supported employment is compared to other programs serving individuals with significant support needs, the costs of the supported employment are less than, or equivalent to, those of other programs. For example, a state by state comparison indicates that the costs of extended services for supported employment participants are from 40% to 80% of the costs of other day service options such as sheltered workshops or activity centers.

In reality, supported employment costs less than other day support options for individuals with significant disabilities. However, many issues exist related to funding local programs. A number of investigations reported in this monograph address the extent to which funding mechanisms affect a local program's ability to (1) maximize consumer choice and self-determination in the supported employment process, (2) implement program conversion efforts, (3) encourage participation by individuals with the most significant support needs, and (4) promote job mobility and career advancement.

Supported employment only serves individuals with developmental disabilities. While supported employment is viewed by some as a small, specialized program that serves only individuals with cognitive disabilities, nothing could be further from the truth. Individuals with long-term mental illness are the fastest growing segment of the supported employment population, while the percentage of participants with cognitive disabilities has declined over the years. Social Security (SSI/DI) beneficiaries comprise nearly three-fourths of supported employment participants. Perhaps more importantly, the individualized placement and support technologies which form the heart of supported employment are being applied to ever expanding groups of individuals. For example, this monograph contains descriptions of new efforts to apply the principles of supported to individuals with disabilities in institutions of higher education, the Social Security Administration Return-to-Work population, and individuals with disabilities exiting public schools.

Supported employment is "mired" in a debate between the natural support model and the job coach model of supported employment. Researchers such as David Mank, Wendy Wood, David Test and many others continue to attempt to define the key components of the natural support technologies and document the relative efficacy of these strategies. However, at the local level, it seems that community rehabilitation programs are using components of both the natural supports and the job coach model to provide services to individual consumers. For example, we report in this monograph that over 85% of all supported employment programs indicate that they use natural supports in the delivery of supported employment services. At the same time, many programs indicate problems with the implementation of natural support strategies and the services and supports provided directly at the job site continue to be highly valued by consumers participating in studies of consumer satisfaction. At the direct service level, local programs continue (as they always have) to use all available strategies and technologies that will promote high quality employment outcomes for individuals participating in their programs.

In this monograph, the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment attempts to address many of the major issues affecting the program as it continues to expand and matures. Articles are included that discuss current trends in service delivery, the experiences of local community employment agencies, issues involved in funding supported employment, natural support implementation

strategies and transition from school to work. The key issues discussed include:

- Results of the 1995 national Survey of Supported Employment Implementation
- Conversion of segregated, facility-base programs to supported employment
- Use of Social Security Work Incentives such as PASS and IRWE
- The Social Security Return to Work Initiative
- Time limited and extended services funding
- The role of employment specialists within natural support programs
- The results of consumer satisfaction interviews with supported employment participants
- Application of support employment strategies to individuals with disabilities in institutions of higher education
- Transition planning for students with significant disabilities

The results of the investigations contained in this monograph represent the collaborative efforts of large number of individuals from across the country. First and foremost, we wish to thank the large numbers of individuals with disabilities who participate in our own supported employment demonstration programs, as well as many other programs throughout the country. These individuals have assisted us in designing our overall research program, developing the investigations reported in this monograph, and participating in focus groups and structured interviews.

We have also been fortunate to receive the cooperation and support of literally hundreds of local community rehabilitation programs across the country. We were able to engage in lengthy interviews with 385 local agencies in 40 different states to obtain the perspective of provider agencies on the key issues affecting supported employment implementation. Many other programs have assisted us in depth examinations of program cost, consumer satisfaction, transition from school to work and other topics. We would like to particularly thank the many state chapters of the Association of Persons in Supported Employment which have recognized the importance of research and constantly challenged us to make our research program relevant to the needs of local practitioners.

Many state and federal agencies have also been instrumental in the design and implementation of our research program. The Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation and the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services have consistently supported our national Survey of Supported Employment Implementation over the past ten years. Their support has been mirrored in the cooperation and assistance we have obtained from the state vocational rehabilitation agencies and other collaborating agencies in virtually every state. Time and again, state vocational rehabilitation agency directors or supported employment coordinators have gone the extra mile to insure that the data we report is complete and accurate. They have also been extraordinarily helpful when we have imposed on them provide last minute information in response to a request from Congress or a federal agency. We cannot thank them enough for the patience and willingness to go the extra mile to make certain that policy-makers and consumers have update and accurate information on supported employment.

John Kregel
Paul Wehman
Michael West

Abstract

Supported employment was initiated through the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1986 specifically to assist persons with the most significant disabilities successfully achieve and retain competitive employment. This study reports the results of a ten year effort to chart the growth of supported employment in areas such as the number and disability profile of participants, consumer outcomes, funding mechanisms and program expenditures. The costs and outcomes for supported employment and sheltered employment are also compared. Strategies are presented to expand the utilization of supported employment and thereby increase employment opportunities available for persons with the most significant disabilities.

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT: A DECADE OF RAPID GROWTH AND IMPACT

By: Paul Wehman, Grant Revell, & John Kregel

In recent years, the unemployment levels of persons with disabilities have received increased attention. A number of federal agencies, public policy makers, consumer groups, and professionals have focused significant attention on why the unemployment rate of persons with disabilities remains so high. This unemployment rate has consistently hovered in the 60% to 70% area for decades despite increased innovations in rehabilitation and newer laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (P.L. 101-336). Innovations such as assistive technology, job coaches, and new training techniques along with progressive laws, designed to ease the entry of persons with disabilities into the competitive work place, have not resulted to date in a noticeable improvement in their level of employment.

For example, the most frequently cited poll in recent years has been by Louis Harris and Associates (1994) which presents a rather discouraging view of the work outcomes achieved by persons with disabilities. In their most recent 1994 poll, Louis Harris and Associates found that two thirds of Americans with disabilities between the ages of 16 and 64 are not working, with only 20% working full time and 11% working part time. They also found that 84% of unemployed people with disabilities say they want to work, an overwhelming majority that has actually risen by 13 percentage points from an earlier poll taken by Louis Harris in 1986.

In addition, the number of working age people with disabilities who receive Disability Insurance (DI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits from the Social Security Administration increased from 4 million in 1985 to 6.3 million in 1994 (General Accounting Office, June 1996). These figures are dramatic indeed because of the enormous expenditures associated with long term retention on Social Security cash benefits. For example, in 1994 the Social Security Administration reports that the DI Program and SSI Program provided $52.9 billion in cash benefits to the 6.3 million working age beneficiaries (General Accounting Office, June 1996). Yet the Louis Harris Poll indicates that the majority of individuals with disabilities want to work. Considering the substantive advances in assistive technology, rehabilitation technology, and medicine, it is reasonable to ask: What employment strategies have demonstrated success in overcoming the perplexing problem of extremely high unemployment among persons with disabilities?

Supported employment is one program specifically designed to assist persons with the most significant disabilities achieve competitive level, community integrated employment. Supported employment first received public funding through the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1986. It has enjoyed steadily increasing popularity since its inception and has achieved carefully documented positive outcomes (Mank, O'Neill, &

Jensen, in press; Revell, Wehman, Kregel, West, & Rayfield, 1994). The major premise of a supported employment program is that many persons with significant disabilities need some additional support at the job site to work successfully. Through the use of employment specialists, mentors, coworkers and employers, the impediments to employment faced by prospective workers are reduced, and their abilities and work potentials are emphasized through supports designed at the workplace. Despite the demonstrated success and value of this model and research which confirms its efficacy (e.g., Bond, Dietzen, McGrew, & Miller, 1995; Drake, McHugo, Becker, Anthony, & Clark, 1996; Coker, Osgood, & Clouse, 1995), supported employment has not yet been fully utilized to impact the thousands of persons with disabilities who remain unemployed.

The ability to be employed is important for many reasons. First, working in competitive employment provides an opportunity to receive wages and benefits that may lead to greater independence and mobility in the community at large. Second, being productive on a daily basis in a meaningful vocation is critically important to one's self-esteem and dignity. Third, establishing new friendships and networks of social support in the community is almost always facilitated by having a job within a career path. And finally as described above, the extraordinary costs associated with maintaining persons with disabilities on Social Security disability rolls are a highly nonproductive and inefficient use of human potential in this country that is now reaching an unacceptable level. This high level of entitlement leads to greater federal deficits and ultimately fosters the incorrect perception among society that people with disabilities are dependent on public support and not capable of active lives that include competitive employment.

As we consider the obvious need to increase our nation's resolve to promote the employment for people with disabilities, one must look carefully at how supported employment might play a role. A number of specialized employment programs for individuals with disabilities have been developed over the years. Some have been effective and some less so. Supported employment is one of the few specialized programs in the Rehabilitation Act that has grown to a size where it has the potential to make a real national impact on the hundreds of thousands of people with disabilities still unemployed. It is a program with carefully documented positive employment outcomes for persons with disabilities in a number of important areas including consumer satisfaction (Test, Hisson, Solow, & Kuel, 1993), job placements (Mank et al, in press), wages and benefits (Kregel, Wehman, & Banks, 1989; Thompson, Powers, & Houchard, 1992), favorable employer perceptions (Kregel & Unger, 1993), and effective support strategies (Parent, Unger, Gibson, & Clements, 1994). Therefore, supported employment has shown itself to be a highly useful program with potential for expansion. This report presents further information on the size and outcomes of the supported employment program by providing fiscal year 1995 data collected from state rehabilitation and other state level agencies funding supported employment services in each of the 50 states in the country.

METHOD

The method employed in the present study built upon a national survey strategy initially developed in 1988 (Wehman, Kregel, & Shafer, 1989) which has been repeatedly modified through feedback by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) and the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR).

Respondents

The study involved a national survey of 54 state/territorial supported employment systems consisting of the 50 states, the District of Columbia,

Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and the Pacific Islands. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies contacted for data on time-limited supported employment services included combined, general, and agencies for persons with visual disabilities. Data covering Fiscal Year 1995 were received from 51 of the 54 state/territorial systems, a 94% response rate for systems surveyed. Data were obtained from systems representing 99% of the persons with disabilities closed successfully in employment by Vocational Rehabilitation agencies in Fiscal Year 1994 after receiving supported employment services (Rehabilitation Services Administration, 1996). The population of the 3 state/territorial systems that chose not to respond to the survey represented less than 0.3% of the total population of the United States, and the missing data have minimal impact on the study results.

Supported employment central office program managers within the VR agency typically served as primary respondents within each state system and frequently assisted staff in coordinating the gathering of information from non-VR data sources. Due to the interagency nature of state supported employment systems, representatives from other state agencies, such as mental health and mental retardation/developmental disabilities, served as secondary respondents. The study results are representative of supported implementation nationally through Vocational Rehabilitation as well as state Mental Health/Developmental Disability programs.

Instrument Utilized

The key data elements for the presentation of these data were collected using several forms of a basic survey initially developed and field tested in 1988 (e.g., West, Revell & Wehman, 1992). Data collection for FY 1995 was the sixth survey conducted using this format, and the aggregate survey results constitute a longitudinal data base on supported employment implementation now covering the period from FY 1986 through FY 1995. The survey instrument and process were reviewed and approved by the Research Committee of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). The current survey elements were as follows:

1. The number of employed persons receiving supported employment services. Participation was categorized by time-limited services, extended services, or other participants in instances where data were not maintained using the time-limited/extended services categories. Participants were counted in only one category to avoid duplication. For example, in instances where an individual moved from time limited to extended supported employment services in FY 95, participation was counted only under time limited services.
2. The number of persons in supported employment utilizing individual or group models.
3. The number of persons in supported employment across primary disability classifications and across levels of mental retardation (MR) for those persons with a primary disability classification of mental retardation.
4. Hourly and weekly wages of persons in supported employment and their hours of weekly employment.
5. Funding sources used to pay for supported employment services.
6. The number of authorized providers of supported employment services and their strategies for providing services (i.e., conversion to supported employment, expansion of services to include supported employment, no prior vocational service history, and others).
7. Types of rate structures used by state VR agencies to purchase supported employment services and rates paid for these services.

Procedure

The survey was mailed to the administrative office of each state VR agency. An initial phone contact was made with each state VR agency to verify

recept of the survey, to identify primary state contact person and other key sources of data within state system, and to develop a state specific plan for collecting the data from VR, MH, MR/DD and any other state level agency/program funding supported employment services. Some states submitted a single response to the survey incorporating available information. For most states, the VR agency supplied data on time limited services, and additional data were gathered by phone on extended services from multiple state contact persons within the MH and MR/DD agencies.

Data was requested for federal Fiscal Year 1995 (October 1, 1994 - September 30, 1995). However, respondents were given the opportunity to supply data for a state fiscal year, usually July 1, 1994 to June 30, 1995, if information requested in the survey was more readily available for that time period. In all cases, information was supplied for a 12 month period recognized by the reporting state as FY 1995. The majority of states supplied information for the Federal FY 1995 time period. Only verifiable data were accepted; estimates were not accepted. The interagency nature of supported employment services and funding resulted in data being drawn from both a federally driven VR reporting system and state driven systems for Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities. Substantial time was spent with state contact persons to assure that data for the survey response were reported consistently and without duplication.

Upon completion of data collection, the data for each state were aggregated into a single state profile, and this profile was reviewed with the state representative(s) for verification. State profiles were verified and clarified through verbal and written dialogue with primary and secondary respondents. State specific data collection and data verification were dependent on the information provided by state agency supported employment representatives, and there was not a secondary/ alternative data source to reverify the state reports. However, the data collected through this study were consistent with other supported employment information such as wages, hours of employment, disability profiles, and expenditures reported on supported employment closures through Vocational Rehabilitation (Rehabilitation Services Administration, 1996). Confidence in the integrity of data reported through this study was achieved based on the interagency participation at the state level in the verification process, the longitudinal nature of the data base for this study where inconsistencies with established patterns could be identified and investigated, and the consistency of the study results with other national supported employment information.

Data collection and verification for FY 1995 were completed in December, 1996. Verified state profile data were aggregated and analyzed using database software, culminating in a longitudinal data base on national supported employment implementation beginning with FY 1986. In instances such as hourly or weekly wages where a national mean was calculated, weighted means were used to adjust for the number of persons within each state.

RESULTS

Supported Employment Participants

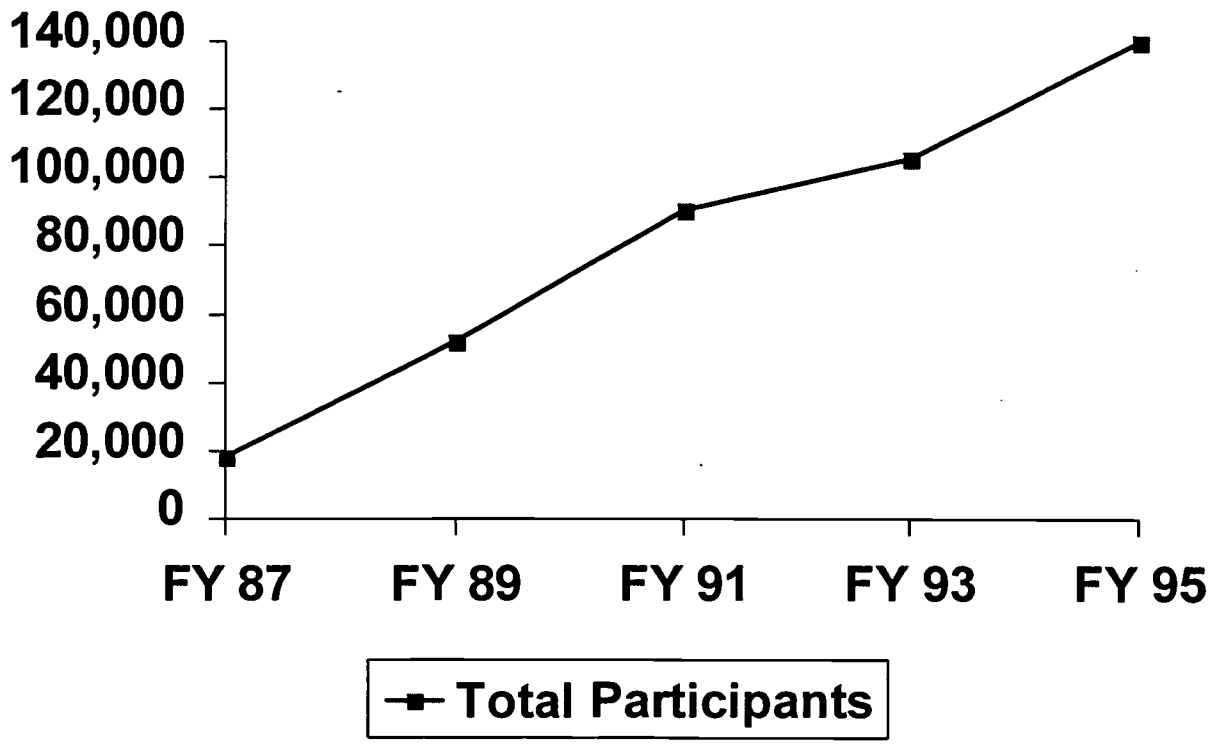
The national growth in supported employment participation from FY 1986 through 1995 is presented in Figure 1. Participation in supported employment has risen from approximately 10,000 persons in Fiscal Year 1986 to over 139,000 in Fiscal Year 1995. The 139,812 participants for FY 95 represents a 16% annual growth rate from the participant total reported for FY 93 (Wehman & Revell, 1996). The 16% annual growth from FY 1993 to FY 1995 is considerably slower than 43% annual growth rate from FY 1989 to 1990, but it is an increase from the 8.3% annual growth rate experienced from FY 1991 to FY 1993. Although the annual supported employment growth rate has

slowed since it peaked in FY 1988, overall annual growth reaccelerated during 1993-1995 to a rate almost double that which occurred during the 1991-1993 period. This reacceleration during 1993-1995 occurred consistent with the initial implementation of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992.

The 139,812 participants identified for FY 1995 should be considered a minimum count because the supported employment information systems of (7) of the reporting states did not maintain information on extended services, and no extended services participation data were reported for these states. In addition, other states acknowledged that reported data did not include a small number of persons, placed in employment in earlier years prior to the development of formal data systems, who presently were not being tracked by either the VR or extended services agencies. Of the 139,812 supported employment participants for FY 1995 reported by representatives of the 51 state/territorial systems responding to the VCU RRTC survey, a total 45,326 (32.4%) were receiving time-limited services and 87,409 (62.5%) were receiving extended services. The remaining 7,077 (5.1%) were listed as other participants. These were identified supported employees for whom data systems could not state with confidence whether they were in time limited or extended service.

Figure 1

Total Number of Supported Employment Participants: Fiscal Years 1987 - 1995



Based on reported data, the ten states with the highest per capita rates of persons in supported employment in FY 95 were as follows: Minnesota, Connecticut, Wyoming, South Dakota, Vermont, Washington, Alaska, Colorado, Wisconsin, and Montana. Per capita rates were determined by using 1990 state census total population data and the reported supported employment participation level identified through this study. Per capita participation in supported employment was calculated per 100,000 in total state population. These placement rates reflect positively on the capabilities of the supported employment service systems for these ten states.

Primary Disability Classification of Supported Employment Participants

The primary disability classification for supported employment participants in FY 1995 varied from the general range that has held fairly constant since FY 1988, the first year which nationally representative disability data were available. For FY 1995, primary disability information was available for 44 of the 51 systems reporting. Persons with a primary disability classification of mental retardation accounted for 61.5% of participants for whom disability information was reported as compared to 70.3% in FY 93. Participation by persons with mental illness increased to 26.0% in FY 95, continuing a primary longitudinal trend for a disability group that accounted for 16.7% of the persons in supported employment in FY 88. Persons with a primary physical disability accounted for 9.7% of the persons in supported employment in FY 95 . Table 1 on the following page shows the relative percentages within primary disability groups of participants for FYs 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1995.

Persons with mental retardation continued in FY 95 to be the dominant population served in supported employment, although the percent of total participants decreased in FY 95 compared to FY 93 for this disability group. Some movement occurred in the relative percentages in individual disability groups for persons with physical disabilities. However, the overall relative participation level remained consistent with earlier studies for persons with a primary disability of a sensory impairment, traumatic brain injury, or other physical disabilities.

Participation in Supported Employment by Persons with Severe or Profound Mental Retardation

The mental retardation disability classification provides one potential indication of the extent to which supported employment services reach those individuals with the most severe disabilities. Table 2 on the following page presents data for FYs 1988, 1991, 1993 and 1995 on relative participation in supported employment by persons with different levels of mental retardation. Persons with mild mental retardation made up over half (51.9%) of the individuals with a primary disability of mental retardation in supported employment in FY 95, an increase from the corresponding 47% figure for FY 93. The percentage of participation by persons at the moderate level of mental retardation has edged slightly downward from FY 1993 to 37.7% in FY 95. Participation by persons at the severe/ profound level of mental retardation was at 10.3% for FY 1995, which is within the same general range reported between FY 1988 and FY 1993.

Of the 35 states reporting information on level of mental retardation for FY 1995, 6 states plus the District of Columbia reported serving in supported employment persons with a primary disability of mental retardation in the severe/ profound MR category at a level above the national norm of 10.6%. The 6 states were: Oregon, Oklahoma, Missouri, Utah, Connecticut, and Illinois. Factors influencing higher levels of participation in these states included specific policies and goals, adopted on an interagency basis, emphasizing community integrated services compared to center based services and also court monitored deinstitutionalization orders.

Table 1

Primary Disability Classification of Supported Employment Participants

Disability Classification	FY 1988	FY 1991	FY 1993	FY 1995
Mental Retardation	70.5%	62.8%	70.3%	61.5%
Mental Illness	16.7%	22.2%	19.3%	26.0%
Sensory Impairments	2.5%	3.0%	2.6%	2.1%
Cerebral Palsy or other Orthopedic/ Paralysis	1.8%	1.6%	2.0%	3.3%
Traumatic Brain Injury	n/a*	n/a*	1.3%	2.6%
Other Physical Disability	n/a*	n/a*	1.3%	2.6%
Other Disability	8.5%	8.3%	3.0%	3.1%

Table 2

Levels of Mental Retardation for Participants with Mental Retardation as a Primary Disability

Level of Mental Retardation	FY 1988	FY 1991	FY 1993	FY 1995
Mild	49.6%	60.9%	47.0%	51.9%
Moderate	37.7%	30.4%	40.1%	37.7%
Severe/Profound	12.7%	8.7%	12.9%	10.3%

Supported Employment Model Utilization

Information on the specific supported employment model utilized indicated that the individual placement model (77.4%) was the dominant supported employment option utilized in FY 95. The remaining supported employment participants for whom a model was specified were in some type of group model (22.6%). It is important to note that group models were used by just 8.7% of persons reported in time limited services. This result indicated a strong preference by Vocational Rehabilitation agencies for funding placement of participants in individual competitive level jobs as compared to group oriented opportunities. The FY 95 data showed a continued predominance in the use of individual placements and represented a substantial longitudinal change from FY 1988, the first year for which comparative data are available. In FY 1988, 52.1% of participants utilized the individual placement model, 28.1% utilized a

group model of either an enclave or a mobile crew, and 19.8% utilized other models such as small business enterprise.

Hourly and Weekly Earnings and Hours of Employment

Calculations of state specific supported employment mean average hourly earnings, weekly earnings, and hours worked were weighted by the number of participants. Weighted means were used in order to adjust for the numbers of persons within each state who contributed to their respective state mean, thus giving more precise estimates of national averages. Mean hourly wages for supported employment participants have steadily increased during the reporting period. For FY 95, 40 states reported a weighted mean hourly wage of $4.70. Comparable wage data was $3.38 for FY 88, $3.87 for FY 1990, $4.45 for FY 1991, and $4.53 for FY 93. It is important to note that the national minimum hourly wage increased from $3.35 to $3.80 on April 1, 1990 and to $4.25 on March 31, 1991. For FY 95, 8 states reported a mean hourly wage below the minimum wage at that time of $4.25. Also in FY 95, 12 state VR agencies for the visually impaired reported a mean hourly wage of $5.33 for persons with a primary visual disability. Table 3 identifies the ten states/systems that reported the highest mean hourly wage among the states reporting wage data for FY 1995. It is interesting to note that Utah and the District of Columbia were the only states/systems identified as serving a percentage of persons with severe/profound mental retardation above the national norm that also appear in Table 3 for higher hourly wages. Supported employment participants in Massachusetts earned the highest reported mean hourly wage ($7.05).

Forty-two states reported FY 95 weekly wage data for supported employment participants. The weighted mean weekly wage was $114.43. In comparison, the corresponding figures were $107.00 FY 93 and $102.34 for FY 90. Massachusetts reported the highest mean weekly wage for FY 95 ($157.28). Also for FY 95, 39 states reported a mean of 23.8 hours of weekly employment, an increase from 22.5 reported for FY 93. Utah reported the highest mean hours of weekly employment (34). Using the reported total participant level of 139,812 for FY 95, the national average weekly earnings of $114.43, and a 48 week work year, **persons in supported employment earned an estimated $768 million in annual wages during FY 95.**

Table 3

States with the Highest Mean Hourly Supported Employment Participants: FY 95

Ranking@	Name of State	Man Hourly Wage
1.	Massachusetts	$7.05
2.	Hawaii	$6.20
3.	District of Columbia	$6.00
4.	Washington	$5.58
5.	Vermont	$5.43
6.	Utah	$5.37
7.	Maine	$5.35
8.	Delaware	$5.18
9.	New York	$5.10
10.	North Carolina	$5.05

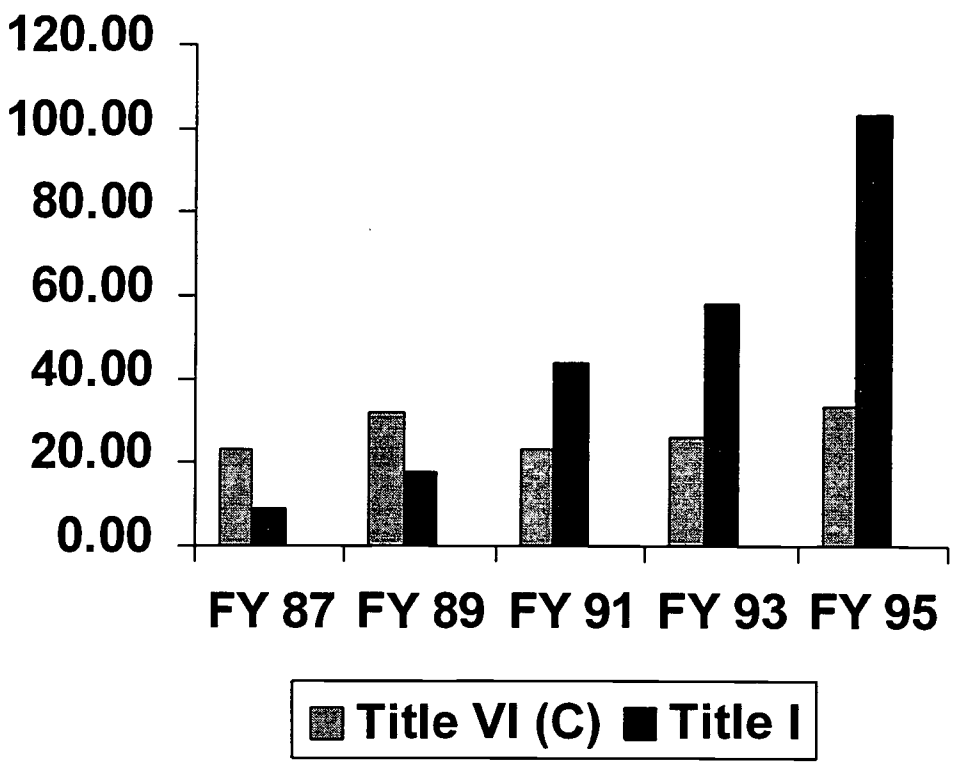
Vocational Rehabilitation Expenditures on Supported Employment

The overall supported employment expenditures for the national vocational rehabilitation program from FY 1986 to FY 1995 are presented in Figure 2 on the following page. These expenditures grew markedly from a reported $1.3 million in FY 86 to $136.6 million for FY 95. The annualized rate of

increase from FY 93 to FY 95 was approximately 31%. In FY 95, $103.3 million were expended on supported employment from Title I federal and state match funds and other state vocational rehabilitation funds. Funds from Title I of the Rehabilitation Act are the general case service dollars available for the purchase of the full array of vocational rehabilitation services. Because of the flexibility allowed in the use of Title I funds, their use for supported employment services is viewed as a key measure of the real growth of supported employment commitments within the VR system.

Figure 2

Vocational Rehabilitation Expenditures for Supported Employment Services (in millions of dollars)



Funding by Other State Agencies or Programs

Funding of supported employment services by non-vocational rehabilitation agencies grew from approximately $18 million for FY 86 to $366 million for FY 95. The predominantly time limited expenditure of $136 million in FY 95 funds through the vocational rehabilitation system helped leverage the $366 million in non-VR funds used in supported employment. Table 4 identifies the predominant non-VR funding sources and amount reported for each source. Mental Retardation/

Developmental Disabilities Agencies reported expending over $313 million for supported employment services, almost twice the $158 million reported by the same funding source for FY 93.

Table 4

Source of Non-VR Funding for Supported Employment Services: FY 95 -- Total Non-VR Funds: $366 million

Source of Funds	Total $ (millions)	% of Total
MR/DD Agency	$313.3	82.6
Mental Health	40.4	10.6
Other **	25.5	6.8

** The Other category includes but is not limited to funding sources such as the Home and Community Based Medicaid Waiver, Departments of Education, Job Training Partnership Act and Developmental Disabilities Planning Councils.

Number of Supported Employment Provider Agencies and Converting Resources from Center Based to Supported Employment

The number of supported employment provider agencies grew steadily for a number of years from an initial count of 324 for FY 86. A surge in national capacity to provide supported employment services occurred in FY 88 when the number of provider agencies grew to 1,877. This growth occurred when there were 27 supported employment state systems development grants in place nationally funded through Title III of the Rehabilitation Act. For FY 95, the number of supported employment provider agencies reported by 48 systems was 3,690, a total consistent with the 3,739 reported for FY 93. Growth no longer appears to be occurring in the total number of programs/ agencies providing supported employment services nationally. However, states such as South Dakota are diversifying and expanding their provider capacity by initiating formalized systems to contract directly with individuals as employment specialists. This arrangement helps bring supported employment to rural, sparsely populated areas where it is frequently difficult for agencies to operate a cost effective service resource.

For FY 95, states were asked to classify the organizational structure used by supported employment provider agencies, and respondents classified 40.5% of the 3,690 provider agencies reported. The percentage of agencies identified as downsizing or terminating other day services to convert resources to provide supported employment services was only 15.0% as compared to the 50.5% that had expanded service options to include supported employment without initiating notable reductions in prior levels of alternative day services. A total of 27.7% of the agencies provided supported employment services only while 6.8% reported other forms of organizational structure. These FY 95 percentages as compared to FY 93 differ mainly in a growth from 18.6% to 27.7% in the relative participation by agencies that provide supported employment services only and a decrease from 58.3% to 50.5% in those providers that expanded options to include supported employment. Growth is not occurring in the relative percent of provider agencies classified as converting resources to supported employment services. States with the higher relative percentages of converting supported employment provider agencies in FY 95 included Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

Funding Methods Utilized to Purchase Supported Employment Services

Respondents were asked to identify the type of funding methods used to purchase supported employment services from local programs. Table 5 on the following page summarizes the different funding methods surveyed and the response rate for each. A detailed description of the various funding methods presented in Table 5 is contained in Revell, West, & Cheng (1997).

Table 5

Funding Methods Utilized for the Purchase of Supported Employment Services

Type of Funding Methods Used	# of Yes Responses	Additional Information
Fixed hourly rates	19	a) Used predominantly for Individual Placement b) 19 State mean average rate: $25.47
Negotiated hourly rates	26	a) Used predominantly for Individual Placement b) 22 State mean average rate: $31.63 c) Some states (Virginia) negotiate rates based on centrally monitored formula. Other states (MI) give local offices flexibility to set "fair market" rates.
Daily fees	12	a) Daily fees are used predominantly for group options such as enclaves or mobile crews. b) Many states funding multiple options have a fee schedule that mixes daily rates for group options & individual placement hourly rates.
Yearly contracts	29	Some history of use with both individual and group options through slot or outcome based service units.
Performance based contracts	20	a) Used with the individual placement model. Specifies points of payment to provider based on successful completion of key service steps such as assessment, job placement, stabilization, and successful closure. b) Example states include OK, TN, and RI.
Other funding methods	17	Example other methods include direct hiring of employment specialists by funding agency as full time employees, special rates for specialists with sign language, start-up grant funding, & capped negotiated fees.

A variety of methods were used to purchase supported employment services in FY 95. Many funding agencies used multiple methods to purchase different supported employment models or to acquire specialized services, such as employment specialists with sign language capability. Negotiated hourly rates and yearly contracts were the most frequently used funding methods. The mean negotiated hourly rate was $31.63, based on 22 different state mean negotiated rates. The mean fixed hourly rate was $25.47, based on 19 different fixed rates. Responses indicated an increasing use of performance/outcome based funding methods. States such as Tennessee, Arkansas, and Oklahoma have switched or in the process of switching to a performance based system after initial use of contract or hourly fee based funding systems. One excellent example of conversion to a performance based funding method can be found in Oklahoma. This state's Milestone Payment system is the outcome of a cooperative effort by the state Vocational Rehabilitation agency and its supported

employment provider network. The outcome is an effective purchase of service system based on sound costing principals and incentives to truly target services to persons with the most significant disabilities within a framework of defined service outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 (P.L. 102-569) establish a set of guiding principles for the provision of employment services for persons with disabilities. These principles focus on the presumed capability of persons with even the most significant disabilities, if they have access to needed services and supports, to pursue meaningful careers by securing gainful employment in integrated settings. Vocational rehabilitation and other employment service funding agencies need effective alternatives to respond to the challenge contained in the 1992 Rehabilitation Act Amendments. The results of the study described above strongly indicate that supported employment services are a primary national resource for assisting persons with disabilities successfully secure gainful employment in integrated settings.

Key findings from the results of the VCU RRTC FY 95 supported employment national implementation survey summarized above include:

1. The 16% annual growth rate for participation in supported employment from FY 1993 to FY 1995 is approximately double the rate of growth from FY 1991 to FY 1993. Vocational Rehabilitation agencies and other funding agencies are turning to supported employment with increasing frequency as a preferred employment service option.

2. The use of supported employment is expanding among persons with long term mental illness, reflecting both a recognition of the viability of this employment resource across disabilities and also the evolution of extended services funding and/or support options to help supported employees maintain employment.

3. Wage outcomes for persons in supported employment are predominantly above minimum wage, and state mean wages range up to $7.00 per hour. The 139,812 persons reported to be in supported employment in FY 1995 had estimated earnings of over $750 million. Although overall supported employment opportunities continue to reflect entry level wage earnings, there are clear indications that progress is being made in a number of states in securing wage opportunities substantially above minimum wage.

4. Approximately 30% of the persons closed in supported employment in FY 1994 by VR agencies were earning less than minimum wage at closure as compared to 20.5% of the non-supported employment closures (Rehabilitation Services Administration, 1996). As noted above in this study, eight states reported a mean state wage in supported employment below the $4.25 per hour national minimum wage in 1995. On February 11, 1997, the Department of Education announced a regulatory change that redefines competitive employment to require wage payment **at or above minimum wage**. Supported employment continues to be defined in the Federal regulations as competitive employment, and persons in supported employment must be earning at least minimum wage at the time of transition from time limited to extended services (Federal Register, February 11, 1997). This minimum wage requirement for persons in supported employment indicates a need for improvements in job selection and the provision of training and supports geared specifically to skill acquisition and productivity.

5. Reported funding for supported employment in FY 1995 totals over $500 million. For state VR agencies, expenditures for supported employment from federal Title I funds and state VR funds are over 3 times greater than expenditures of federal Title VIC supported

employment formula grant funds. VR expenditure levels and patterns indicate that persons with disabilities are choosing supported employment with increasing frequency. Rapidly expanding expenditure levels through MR/DD and Mental Health systems demonstrate the interagency commitment to supported employment.

6. State funding agencies are securing supported employment services from provider agencies through a variety of funding methods. Increased attention is given to focusing on positive employment outcomes within a funding design that makes a good faith effort to cover true costs while emphasizing service access for persons with the most significant disabilities.

In addition, these survey results reflect the continuing demands facing supported employment systems to both expand access for persons who truly are the most significantly challenged in securing competitive employment and to convert resources away from center- based use to community integrated competitive employment. There are several predominant state examples of progress and achievement in both these areas, such as Oregon, Oklahoma, Missouri, and Utah on participation of persons with severe mental retardation and Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, and Wisconsin for conversion to community integrated services. There is concrete evidence that supported employment can be implemented to achieve valued employment outcomes for an array of persons with disabilities through equitable and effective funding designs.

Utilization of Supported Employment Services as Compared to Sheltered Employment

The indications of accelerated use of supported employment found in the results of this study are corroborated by other data. Within the state VR agencies, there is a noticeable multi-year pattern of increased use of supported employment and decreased use of sheltered employment. For example, sheltered employment closures (Status 26) by state VR agencies decreased by 24% between FY 90 and FY 94. During the same period, supported employment closures increased by 31%. Supported employment closures by state VR agencies in FY 1994 exceeded sheltered employment closures by more than 5,000 individuals (RSA, 1991; RSA, 1996). The basis for this shift towards supported employment and away from sheltered employment can be found in cost and outcome data. The mean cost of VR services per sheltered employment closure in FY 1994 was $3,508 as compared to $4,763 for supported employment. However, the mean weekly earnings of persons in supported employment ($112) were twice those achieved in sheltered employment ($55) (RSA, 1996). Within the Vocational Rehabilitation system, the return on public expenditures for supported employment services for persons with disabilities is substantially greater than those achieved through sheltered employment. Efforts to implement the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 are characterized by consumers of vocational rehabilitation services increasing their participation in supported employment services while decreasing use of sheltered employment services.

Growth Patterns in Supported Employment: Strategies to Enhance Program Expansion

The heart and soul of supported employment lies in meaningful employment outcomes. Competitive employment earnings (Thompson, Powers & Houchard, 1992), enhanced fringe benefits (West, Kregel & Banks, 1990), full inclusion into the business workforce (Parent, Kregel, Metzler, & Twardzik, 1992) and improved employment retention (Kregel, Parent, & West, 1994) are among the major outcomes for which quality supported employment programs and consumers with disabilities strive. A major promise of supported employment is to help individuals with severe disabilities increase upward mobility into long term careers with access to high quality jobs.

There are only a limited number of programs nationally which have accomplished

these goals well. For example, King County, Washington, near Seattle, recently showed how 55 persons with severe developmental disabilities were able to average earned income of over $13,000 per year (Mank et al, in press). In this program, staff worked effectively with local government officials, as well as consumers and their families, to design the supports necessary. As a result, participants earned wages that far exceeded most persons in supported employment, where the national wage level is $4.75 per hour.

In another demonstration of excellence, this one focusing more on integration, Mank (1996) studied a series of community programs and businesses to assess the level of inclusion which persons with disabilities experienced. Integration into competitive employment is one of the major elements of the definition of supported employment, yet it has been achieved with only varying levels of success. Mank and his colleagues studied a number of businesses to determine the degree of integration for persons with disabilities in terms of hiring, training, supervision, and other factors. The resulting database of over 500 supported workers in many companies allowed the researchers to identify different types of business environments, some of which led to greatly enhanced inclusion as well as increased wages and benefits. From this study of different businesses, a concept of "typicality" emerged, finding that the more an individual with a disability was viewed as a typical worker (not a worker with a disability), the better the work outcomes which followed. This typicality was available in some businesses, but absent in others.

These efforts to show greatly increased wages and improved inclusion outcomes are in the minority, yet provide reason for encouragement. More study is required and we need to use these results to help other programs. In order to extend the findings of these programs we must ask: What is occurring in these programs which have facilitated such positive outcomes? Why are they working and what can we learn by doing in-depth studies of these programs? Why have many other supported employment programs fallen short of these outcomes? And how can we best provide technical assistance to other programs and states about successful models like this one?

In this era of fiscal austerity and increased scrutiny of publicly funded programs in education and rehabilitation, supported employment has emerged as a program able to document successful employment outcomes. There are few programs in the employment area that can match supported employment's dramatic sustained growth in the number of participants with significant disabilities assisted into competitive employment positions. The supported employment growth rates over the last decade in wages and participation by those with different disabilities are testimony to the wisdom of this federal investment. There are signs that the number of persons participating in supported employment are beginning to reaccelerate again from the initial growth spurt in the mid 1980s. The question no longer is does supported employment work, but instead: **What will it take to expand the number and range of individuals with significant disabilities participating in this program?**

There has been much research published in recent years about the efficacy of supported employment. Yet, despite its successes, this program continues to be very limited in its overall impact on the unemployment rate of persons with disabilities. There are, however, a number of possible strategies that would substantially leverage the use of supported employment to ensure better competitive level work outcomes for those individuals still waiting for employment assistance.

Community Mobilization

Mobilizing communities to understand better the value of an effective supported employment program is a necessary and major systems change strategy. We now know more than ever how to assist people with quite significant disabilities enter

the workforce and stay employed successfully through the use of job coach and coworker supports. Yet, regardless of how successful we may be on individual cases, the fact remains that most local community programs (e.g. public schools, day programs, sheltered workshops) are not emphasizing supported employment or related activities which culminate directly in competitive employment. The overwhelming emphasis of most of these local systems continues to be in the area of center-based readiness training, evaluation, and other process activities which do not usually maximize the competitive employment potential of the persons with significant disabilities.

Dissemination of Information

Wide spread dissemination of information about the effectiveness of supported employment through newspapers, television and radio, as well as community presentations with retail merchants, Kiwanis clubs, church groups, and school boards is an excellent strategy to communicate the vocational potential of individuals with significant disabilities. A strategic approach would be to work with parents who are fully committed to improving services for their adult children with mental retardation or other developmental disabilities by targeting those families for competitive employment opportunities. Often families who are initially reluctant or uncertain about the long term outcome of competitive employment can be the most supportive and influential if they are shown how successful such a program can be. In the end, the most successful way to change local systems is to show how supported employment can work with those individuals that others have considered totally unemployable or "too severely handicapped." As more and more of these success stories occur, then local and state programs must begin to look harder at changing their procedures and policies, most of which do not favor supported employment but instead promote maintenance of status quo center-based programming.

Expand Participation

The data presented in the Tables 1 and 2 show participation that continues to emphasize only those labeled with mental retardation and mental illness. A continued focus remains on primarily serving those with mild and moderate levels of disabilities as opposed to the most severe disabilities. When the participation level is segmented like this, then the overall program suffers. The strength of supported employment program rests on the ability to include all of those individuals with the most severe disabilities. The concept of "zero reject" has been applied in special education (Brown & York, 1974) to include all children with severe disabilities into public school. The same concept needs to be applied as supported employment programs are implemented. The dream of supported employment rests upon serving those with the most severe disabilities and not to simply create large numbers of placements without consumer satisfaction, a career path, and long term retention. To settle for less is to compromise the validity of a supported employment approach.

Clearly, supported employment participation has only been expanded marginally across all of the disability categories. While it is encouraging to see some progress, many more of the funds now directed to segregated day program activities must be redirected to competitive employment efforts. And those individuals who do not currently have access to any type of long term funds (e.g. people with brain injuries, physical disabilities, and other groups) must be included in the long range funding plans of states.

CONCLUSION

This paper chronicles the successful impact of supported employment over the past decade. Supported employment is a program that works effectively when in the hands of a committed organization with well trained employment

specialists who work closely with the business and family. Its strength rests in targeting those persons with severe disabilities who face the greatest employment challenges.

Tremendous progress has been made in a relatively short time period of only a decade. If one would apply the recent 16% annual growth rate in supported employment participation out for another 10 years, we would see that over 600,000 persons would be in competitive employment. We need to marshall the collective will to change systems at the local level by high profile demonstration, publicity, and above all successful supported employment practices which are defined by long term consumer satisfaction with the job and family and employer acceptance.

Competitive employment is a positive and often therapeutic activity that directly influences self-esteem, personal value, and how persons with a significant disability see themselves. Going to a real job, getting paid, having coworkers, and getting into a normal daily work routine are critical aspects of life. Too many persons with significant disabilities are needlessly left out of this experience. Supported employment is an approach with the demonstrated ability to definitively reverse this unnecessary lack of employment. Community rehabilitation programs and individuals with disabilities face a challenge as the century ends...will they close the gap and join the business labor force?

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Abstract

The Social Security Administration (SSA) disability programs have experienced tremendous growth in both beneficiaries and expenditures, threatening the viability of this safety net for individuals with disabilities. This article suggests that one means of assisting SSA beneficiaries to reduce dependence, thereby slowing program growth, is for SSA to directly or indirectly fund competitive employment initiatives focusing on individuals who are currently served in nonremunerative day support programs. These initiatives require coordination of SSA trust funds with vocational rehabilitation and mental retardation/developmental disability funding streams.

Improving Access to Competitive Employment for Persons with Developmental Disabilities as a Means of Reducing Social Security Expenditures

By: Paul Wehman, Michael West, & Kelly Kane-Johnson

We live in an unprecedented era of fiscal demands on health and human service programs in the United States. For decades, education, health and rehabilitation programs have steadily grown in size. Concurrent with this growth has been a dramatic acceleration in funds expended on behalf of Social Security Administration (SSA) beneficiaries, both from the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program and Disability Insurance (DI) (Stapleton & Dietrich, 1995). This increase in expenditures has given politicians and policy makers serious concern. Given extraordinary budget deficits over the past 15 years, taxpayers no longer have the luxury of funding disability programs which do not yield meaningful outcomes. In the case of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and return to work programs, meaningful outcomes are those which help people with significant disabilities gain and hold competitive employment.

From 1990 to 1995, SSA disability benefit program expenditures grew from $31.1 billion to $52.3 billion, a 68% increase (Daly, 1995). The primary causes for this growth are (1) increasing numbers of persons applying and determined eligible, and (2) lack of return to the work force for beneficiaries (Rupp & Scott, 1995). Both of these variables could be substantially and positively altered if competitive employment was emphasized as a national policy initiative. This paper proposes just such an initiative for one segment of SSI/DI beneficiaries, those receiving extended employment services funded through the Federal/state Vocational Rehabilitation program and state mental retardation/developmental disability systems.

Overview of Supported Employment for Persons with Severe Disabilities

Competitive employment has historically been viewed as beyond the reach of millions of Americans with disabilities. Congress and SSA have supported this belief by providing long term payments to persons with disabilities for not working (Stapleton, July 17, 1996). However, these policies ignore recent advances made in employment services, such as job coaches, natural supports, assistive technologies, and legislative mandates such as Americans with Disabilities Act (PL 101-336). Sadly, what has resulted is long term placement of many persons with significant disabilities in nursing homes (Braddock, Hemp, Bachelder, & Fujiura, 1995), segregated employment or day programs such as adult activity centers and sheltered workshops (Murphy & Rogan, 1995), or on waiting lists (Hayden & Abery, 1994).

It is individuals in segregated work options who are the primary focus of this article. Segregated options go by such names as sheltered workshops, work activity centers, day treatment

centers, or day support centers. In these types of facilities, contracted work is brought into the center for participants to perform. Most are certified by the U.S. Department of Labor to pay salaries below the national minimum wage if the productivity of participants is determined to be substantially less than non-handicapped workers performing similar work. Many such centers lack steady contract work, and many focus primarily on teaching pre-vocational or social skills rather than providing remunerative employment (Schuster, 1990).

An alternative vocational approach which has been developed specifically for individuals with severe disabilities is supported employment. This employment option combines time-limited training and adjustment services provided at the place of employment, with ongoing follow-along services to the consumer and/or employer to promote job maintenance (Wehman & Kregel, 1985). According to current VR regulations (Federal Register, June 24, 1992), the target population consists of those with "the most severe disabilities" who traditionally have not had access to competitive employment, that is, have been served in segregated options or have been unable to access vocational services altogether. This program has grown from fewer than 10,000 participants in 1986 to over 105,000 in 1993 (Wehman & Revell, in press).

How Well Does Supported Employment Work?

After over a decade of research, empirical evidence confirms that the majority of individuals with severe disabilities who need relatively permanent employment services fare better in supported employment than in sheltered work or other types of day services. One of the first studies was the National Employment Survey for Adults with Developmental Disabilities (Kiernan, McGaughey, & Schalock, 1986), which examined segregated and integrated services and outcomes for more than 85,000 individuals served by 1,119 agencies. Quarterly earnings of sheltered workshop clients were $402.75, compared to $786.01 for individuals in supported employment, with hourly wages averaging $1.31 and $2.59, respectively.

Coker, Osgood, and Clouse (1995) studied individuals in sheltered and supported employment who were matched by age, sex, measures of intelligence, primary disability, and secondary disabilities. Average hourly wages of those in sheltered employment was $1.72, compared to $3.95 for those in supported employment; average annual salary for individuals in supported employment was double that of their matched cohorts in sheltered employment. It should also be that these two studies only examined sheltered employment earnings. Many supported employment participants have previously been involved in day support services with little or no remuneration, or were out of the service system altogether, and so their earnings would be even lower.

Longitudinal analyses of persons moving from sheltered to supported employment have also been conducted. Early studies (Hill & Wehman, 1983; Lagomarcino, 1986; Vogelsberg, Ashe, & Williams, 1985) established that both service consumers and taxpayers benefitted from service movement. More recent evidence continues to affirm these benefits (Helms, Moore, & McSewyn, 1991; Thompson, Powers, & Houchard, 1992). For example, Kregel, Wehman, and Banks (1989) studied 1,550 individuals who transitioned from alternative services to supported employment and found that weekly work hours, hourly salaries, and monthly earnings increased from 280% to 576% across disability groups. Finally, RSA data for FY 1991 show that individuals entering supported employment averaged $0.84 an hour in their

previous places of employment (again, primarily sheltered employment and work activities), but were closed earning an average of $4.13 per hour.

These data are extremely encouraging in that we have found an employment philosophy and technology that works. Thousands of individuals who were previously deemed unproductive by industrial standards and paid accordingly have been assisted to perform work at or above minimum wage in the competitive work force. However, this option must be utilized more fully and invested in nationally to affect the historical trends of segregation of persons with severe disabilities.

A Status Report on Movement from Segregated to Competitive Employment

Despite the growth of the supported employment program, all available evidence indicates that segregated employment services remain the primary service options for the overwhelming majority of individuals receiving long-term employment services (Mank, 1994; McGaughey, Kiernan, McNally, Gilmore, & Keith, 1994). A survey of state mental retardation and developmental disabilities funding systems found that the majority of consumers receiving extended employment services were in sheltered employment (44%) and day activity programs (37%), with only 16% served in supported employment (McGaughey, Kiernan, McNally, & Gilmore, 1993). Additionally, a survey of day programs conducted by McGaughey, et al. (1994) found that while the number of persons served in integrated employment increased dramatically from 1986 to 1991, the average number of persons in segregated options also increased by over 28%.

These are critical data to evaluate, especially when one considers the efficacy of supported employment as an alternative strategy for enhancing competitive employment as an outcome. This article proposes a Federally-funded competitive employment initiative for those individuals currently and potentially receiving segregated vocational services, as a means of increasing their earnings and reducing dependence on SSA disability programs.

Supported employment programs have primarily been initiated within existing VR-funded rehabilitation facilities that long histories of providing sheltered employment, day activity services, and other segregated services for their caseloads. Those facilities remain the primary points of access to community-based employment services, including supported employment. A major impediment to increasing the numbers of individuals with severe disabilities entering supported competitive employment is the conflicting and counter-productive ways in which Federal funds are used by the states and consequently by provider agencies. Recent empirical evidence supports this assertion:

1. The Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU-RRTC) conducts annual surveys of state supported employment programs, including the VR and extended service (mental health, mental retardation, etc.) service agencies. This survey has consistently found that only a small percentage of provider agencies have shifted resources from segregated services to supported employment. In FY 1993, the most recent year for which data have been collected, respondents indicated only 15.7% of agencies in their state had downsized segregated services (Wehman & Revell, in press).

2. The VCU-RRTC also recently completed (August, 1995) a national survey of 385 randomly-selected supported employment

provider agencies in 40 states. Survey respondents were asked if their agency had downsized staff, consumers, or funds allocated for segregated employment options and increased that of community-based employment services. Only 87 (22.6%) of survey respondents indicated that their agency had shifted resources to community-based employment. Moreover, after an average of five years of conversion effort, these agencies as a group continued to allocate most service slots and financial resources to segregated services (VCU-RRTC, unpublished raw data).

3. A national survey of 643 vocational service providers conducted by the Institute for Community Inclusion (McGaughey et al., 1994) requested respondents to identify their agencies' segregated and integrated service trends for the previous five years. Only 18% of agencies reported that they had reduced or discontinued their facility-based programs, with the majority either expanding or keeping constant their consumers in segregated options.

4. The McGaughey et al. study (1994) also requested the number of individuals who had entered facility-based services and community-based employment during the previous year. Respondents reported that more individuals entered segregated programs than entered supported and non-supported competitive employment combined.

5. Finally, RSA data for FY 1993 indicate that 9,930 individuals were closed rehabilitated in sheltered employment that year, despite the mandates of the 1992 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act for integrated, competitive employment as the option of choice.

These data reinforce what most consumers, community providers, and funding agencies already know: The first choice of day program options for most people with significant disabilities is <u>not</u> competitive work. Clearly, if individuals with severe disabilities are to enter the competitive work force to the extent of their capabilities, the agencies that plan and provide services must be encouraged and assisted to reduce the size of segregated work options that consume the majority of program staff, budget, and effort.

CONVERSION FROM SEGREGATED DAY PROGRAMS TO COMPETITIVE EMPLOYMENT AS A STRATEGY FOR REDUCING SSA TRUST FUND EXPENDITURES

For individuals with disabilities in the United States, the primary source of support is Medicaid, and most states use SSI eligibility for determining Medicaid eligibility (Braddock & Hemp, 1996). Of 33.4 million Medicaid beneficiaries in 1993, 3.5% were adults with mental retardation or developmental disabilities, and 11.5% were adults with other types of disabilities. An unknown number of persons with disabilities are also likely to be included under other beneficiary subgroups, such as children, elderly persons, and recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). While SSI is a means tested program, DI requires that an individual meet insured status based on recent work activity. Approximately one-third of SSI beneficiaries are also SSDI recipients.

The economic disincentives of employment for SSA beneficiaries have been well documented. As Bowe (1993) notes, SSI and DI are "dependence oriented." That is, in order to receive assistance claimants must prove themselves to be incapable of engaging in substantial gainful activity (SGA), currently defined by SSA as earned income of at least $500 per month. Fear of losing benefits, particularly health care coverage, per-suades most beneficiaries to limit their earnings or not enter the job market at all. Data reported by the SSA (1996) underscore the economic dependence experienced

by beneficiaries (see Table 1 on the following page). Moreover, analysis conducted by SSA indicates that in the overwhelming majority of cases, individuals tend to remain on SSI and SSDI rolls until they either reach retirement age, at which point they are eligible for Social Security, or until death (Rupp & Scott, 1995).

Table 1

Employment Status of SSI Beneficiaries as of March, 1996

5,179,015 disabled SSI recipients
68.4% are working age (18-64)
8% of disabled SSI recipients of working age had earnings
Average earnings were $317 a month

Source: Social Security Administration, 1996

Effect of VR Services on SSI/DI Benefit Status

As previously documented, the majority of individuals with severe disabilities who are enrolled in vocational services are served in segregated options and wages in those options tend to be low, typically below minimum wage. A logical assumption would be that the majority of these individuals would fail to achieve SGA. While information is not directly available regarding receipt of benefits for individuals in segregated options, available evidence indicates that this is indeed true. Data reported by the RSA for VR case closures in FY 1993, the most recent year available, indicate that of 10,544 individuals closed in sheltered employment, 27.5% received DI benefits and 56.6% received SSI at the point of case closure, compared to only 13.7% and 11%, respectively, of individuals closed in competitive employment.

It should be noted that this population only includes individuals whose cases were successfully closed by the VR system in one year. An estimated 711,000 individuals, primarily with mental retardation and other developmental disabilities, are currently served in segregated work or non-remunerative activity programs (McGaughey et al., 1994). Because individuals in such programs have limited or no earnings, the percentages cited above for participation in SSI/DI should be considered very conservative estimates. Still, assuming equal participation in the SSI/DI programs, at least one-half million individuals in segregated employment services receive SSI, DI, or both. Because few individuals placed into segregated work options leave to enter the competitive work world (Murphy & Rogan, 1995; Schuster, 1990), the likelihood of leaving the SSA rolls as a result of segregated employment is negligible.

A Rationale for a Conversion Strategy

A primary rationale underlying a changeover strategy from predominately segregated work programs to integrated employment is that those individuals who are in segregated work programs are more likely to be dependent on SSA benefits than are those in competitive employment. Obviously, this affirms what we all know instinctively. This is a critical rationale because this allocation of trust fund moneys, as well as enormous amounts of local, state, and other Federal funds from VR, mental health, and mental retardation agencies have gone into facility-based services, assuming that these were important training grounds for individuals with disabilities to ultimately enter the competitive work force.

Obviously the long term data compiled by McGaughey et al. (1994) and other sources show that this has not been the case. Our own research at

the VCU/RRTC strongly suggests that once people enter supported employment they are more inclined to have their competitive employment work income be their primary source of support, with Social Security being a secondary source (Kregel et al., 1989). National data from the RSA confirm this as well; at intake 43% of supported employment participants' primary source of support is SSI or DI. Although many supported employees continue to receive a reduced level of benefits at closure, the primary source of support for the majority of participants is their own earnings.

An illustration of reduced SSI dependence from our own supported employment consumers would be instructive. Brandon is a young man of 21 years who has moderate mental retardation and cerebral palsy. He attends a local high school and will be graduating this June. Before he acquired his first job, he was receiving $300 a month in SSI benefits. His only activities outside of school were watching sports on TV and listening to the radio, with bowling on Fridays with his family.

Brandon started working with a job coach in September 1994. After spending time with him and discussing his job preferences, the job coach assisted Brandon to obtain a job at a local grocery store as a courtesy clerk and bagger. He works from 15 to 20 hours per week at $4.50 per hour. Since he began working, Brandon's life outside of school has changed dramatically. He is socializing more with his nondisabled peers at school, and participates in activities at work, such as contests, incentive programs, company picnics and parties. After graduation, he will have the chance to expand his work hours. Brandon's SSI benefit has decreased to $169 per month, for an annual savings to the Social Security trust fund of $1,572 per year.

Brandon's case helps to put a human face on this challenging public policy arena. Without the assistance of a job coach, what chance of competitive employment would Brandon have had? If Brandon's life after school was typical of most individuals with multiple disabilities, i.e., graduation to segregated services or to waiting lists for services, what would his SSI benefit have been?

If only half of the persons currently served in sheltered workshops and activity centers could enter supported employment like Brandon, the savings to the Social Security trust fund would approach $400 million per year. Yet people like Brandon, who are given the chance to work in supported employment rather than in sheltered programs, are the exception. In order to increase the likelihood that more are afforded this choice, it is critical to tie the funds that day programs receive to the nature of the service and into ultimately the outcomes they deliver. If a day program receives a certain number of program slots and a per diem rate of reimbursement regardless of the nature of the service or outcomes for the consumer (a very common practice in state mental retardation/ developmental disability systems) then we should not be surprised if they deliver essentially segregated day program services, which may likely include nonremunerative activities.

Leveraging the Power of the Rehabilitation Act

The Rehabilitation Act, which comes up for reauthorization next year, is one way to implement local systems change efforts. Suggested amendments (Mank, 1994; Wehman & Kregel, 1995) might include:

- Requirements for VR Counselors that the only successful closures (Status 26) are those which occur in competitive employment. Currently in many states, placement into unpaid occupations or low-paying segregated settings can be counted as successful placements.

- Termination of the use of Rehabilitation Act funds for construction of facilities and purchase of equipment for in-house work. Title I of the Rehabilitation Act allows states to allocate establishment grants for these purposes.

- Replacement of per capita funding to the states with allocations based on the previous fiscal year's successful competitive employment closures. Chapter 110 funding formulas should provide incentives for competitive employment (including supported employment) as the ultimate goal for all consumers.

While some may find these to be radical suggestions, the fact remains that the ADA, The Developmental Disabilities Act, and the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 all philosophically and legally promote competitive employment as a preferred outcome, yet funding methods and implementation have failed to follow suit. It can be argued that many of the funds that are supporting local day programs are not Federal in nature, and instead flow from general state revenue and local community service programs. Yet, if the Federal government would even subtly shift its emphasis to placing a premium on funding competitive employment, this would be a powerful message to local and state policy makers that the Federal government, including SSA, is extremely interested in helping people with disabilities realize their full work potential and to fulfill its national policy of integrated employment for all citizens with disabilities.

It seems unlikely, however, to assume that large numbers of the 5,000 to 6,000 day programs and rehabilitation facilities can rapidly convert over 40 years of entrenched day program services into community based and business industry oriented competitive employment. Therefore, it would be advantageous if a small percentage of the SSA trust funds could be utilized in the capacity of both financial incentives for change, with a financial reserve to help community rehabilitation providers make this difficult one time only changeover, along with training and technical assistance funds to help accomplish this task. The amount of funds need not be overwhelming if part of the Medicaid Waiver portions of Rehabilitation Act case service dollars and a very small portion of the Social Security trust funds were allocated for the "Operation Competitive Employment" initiative. This type of strategy would seem to hold an enormous amount of potential for stimulating the activities that are necessary for community rehabilitation providers to expand supported employment services.

THE ULTIMATE ISSUE FOR SSA

The ultimate issue for SSA policy in the context of a policy related to defunding segregated day programs is: Will a significantly large enough group of people who are on SSI or DI who participate in these programs be able to greatly reduce their reliance on these funds if a conversion or changeover strategy is aggressively pursued by the Social Security Administration? In order to answer this question, we must be able to confirm first that there are a large number of people in these programs. This is possible through MR/DD, MH, and VR data. In addition to knowing the number of people who are in these programs, we need to understand their likelihood for staying on SSI or DI for long periods of time. Once again the data certainly seem to support this notion. Finally we must validate the fact that SSI or DI beneficiaries who are in segregated day programs are likely to stay there for a long time. There seems to be a significant amount of data from a number of sources that confirm this as well. Persons who are assigned to sheltered workshops and adult activity centers do not rapidly exit these programs into competitive employment for long periods of time; in fact, the opposite appears to be the norm.

Because the employment rate and earnings of SSI beneficiaries are both so low (e.g., SSA, 1996) that even a modest amount of success in reversing the long-term trend toward entrenchment of day programs would in a relative short period of

time begin to pay off. One can reasonably ask, however, if supported employment in the last 8 to 9 years has been successful with over 100,000 participants now involved in supported employment or a 10 fold increase since 1986, why has there not been more of a significant reduction in the SSA liability? A reasonable answer to this is that as a nation we have made only a relatively small public investment in supported employment, several hundred million dollars over a 5 to 8 year period from all sources, Federal, state, and local (Revell, Wehman, Kregel, West, & Rayfield, 1994). Consider the possibility of 1 to 2 billion dollars going into financial incentives for changeover and technical assistance and training, as well as a clearly defined mission statement to help people with disabilities leave SSI/DI rolls and become either partially or fully employed. Supported employment has to date represented a large national demonstration that has not had the depth of financial resources behind it.

A National Changeover Strategy from Segregated Competitive Employment

In this section, we will describe a seven-point strategic plan for a national shift in policy and practice in the employment of SSA beneficiaries. Several of these points have been alluded to previously but warrant reiteration. We believe that each of these strategies is consistent with national policy as iterated in the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act, with best practices, and with the demands and interests of individuals with disabilities and their families. Most require coordination of effort from Federal programs that fund services for individuals with disabilities, including SSA, VR, the Administration on Developmental Disabilities, and other agencies. However, this coordination is essential to achieving a coherent nation policy on disability that focuses on meaningful employment, at levels consistent with individuals' full potential, reduced economic dependency, and consumer-driven services.

***Strategy #1**: Phase out segregated options for persons entering the adult service system.* It is improbable and unrealistic to expect that all SSA beneficiaries involved in segregated work and non-work programs can be moved to supported employment programs immediately or even within a few years. However, the conversion of state, local, and Federal resources from segregated to integrated options can be accomplished through attrition and by phasing out segregated options for persons who are entering the adult service system. As Mank (1994) writes, this policy change is the "clearest statement that can be made about the future of employment for people with significant disabilities" (p. 17).

***Strategy #2**: Cap current funding for existing segregated work and non-work options.* A finite amount of public resources are available for employment services for individuals with disabilities. It is imperative and consistent with national policy that those resources be used in ways that promote consumer choice and self-determination, financial independence, and quality of life. Clearly, these goals and career choices can best be reached by putting resources into competitive employment options, including supported employment for those with the most severe disabilities. Several states have already moved to halt the growth of segregated services by capping funds or program slots (e.g., Washington, Oregon).

***Strategy #3**: Provide financial incentives for competitive employment.* Many provider agencies face financial disincentives to expanding their supported employment programs to accommodate all eligible consumers (West, 1995). To offset these disincentives, rehabilitation facilities can be given a premium, financed by the SSA trust fund, for supported employment placements of SSI/DI beneficiaries with severe disabilities. These

premiums can be directly based on the amount of reduction of the beneficiary's SSI or DI cash benefits. This proposal is similar to that offered by other groups (i.e., the Return to Work Group) for nonworking SSA beneficiaries; however, SSA should also target individuals who are currently receiving segregated services who would benefit from supported or unsupported competitive employment, and are therefore working and earning below their capabilities.

Strategy #4: *Coordinate Federal/state funds and SSA trust funds.* A national changeover strategy from segregated to integrated employment for all who would choose that option requires that RSA, SSA, and state agencies be consistent in both policy and funding with one another and consistent with national policy as iterated in the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Eliminating the cycles of dependency and underemployment of SSI/DI beneficiaries requires that all governmental entities reinforce competitive work placements for persons with disabilities and eliminate disincentives within the system to convert resources to supported employment for those with the most severe disabilities.

Strategy #5: *Stimulate provider agency conversion.* All providers of Federally-funded vocational services should be required to develop a five-year strategic plan that targets competitive employment for at least 50% of their constituents, and provide them the technical assistance and financial support needed to accomplish this goal. This will help to "level the playing field" of employment services and give consumers and their families more opportunities to enter the competitive work force and increased choice in the types of services and jobs they wish to pursue.

Strategy #6: *Establish a Pool of Federal reserves.* Many provider agencies do not initiate or expand competitive employment options for their consumers with severe disabilities because of limited staff expertise and organizational experience. Funds should be made available by Federal sources (i.e., RSA, SSA) for training and technical assistance needs and for short-term assistance in staffing. These funds could be appropriated to the states for targeting TA needs, such as new providers of supported employment, unserved or underserved geographic areas, etc.

Strategy #7: *Make key amendments to the Rehabilitation Act.* We have noted that VR Counselors in many states have the option of closing individuals successfully in sheltered employment and even unpaid occupations. Eliminating these options will provide an incentive to Counselors to authorize supported employment for individuals with the most severe disabilities. In addition, Title I of the Rehabilitation Act allows states to allocate establishment grants for the construction of rehabilitation facilities and purchase of equipment for in-house contracts. Rather than spending precious funds to construct buildings to continue segregated services, these funds could be better spent on building business alliances, community support systems, assistive technology resources, and community placement capacities.

CONCLUSION

Despite a national policy of integration and competitive employment for individuals with disabilities mandated by the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act, and despite systems change initiatives across the nation funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), integrated and segregated vocational service options continue to compete for funds and participants. Mank (1994) argues that this situation is caused by conflicting national disability services policies in that the same legislation and programs that fund integrated employment training and placement also fund segregated services. Provider agencies which are not committed to expansion of integrated

employment opportunities have little economic incentive to do so.

In this article, we have presented a rationale and strategies for a national initiative to expand competitive employment options for individuals with disabilities, coordinating SSA, RSA, and mental retardation/developmental disability funding streams and policies. We can no longer continue to deny the overwhelming majority of persons receiving long-term employment supports the chance to escape unemployment, underemployment, and segregation, while waiting for provider agencies to, in the words of Weiner-Zivolich and Zivolich (1995), "convert their values and services at their own pace" (p. 311). Beyond the need to preserve Social Security benefits, radical new policy directions and initiatives are needed in order for individuals with significant disabilities to realize the goals of full citizenship and self-determination as iterated in the ADA and the Rehabilitation Act.

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Abstract

This article reports findings from a national survey of day support providers regarding conversion of resources from segregated services to supported employment. Approximately 23% of all agencies and 37% of agencies with both facility-based programs and supported employment indicated that they had converted resources to community-based employment. After an average of five years of conversion, over half of agencies' consumers and budgets continued to be in facility-based programs. Boards of Directors, funding agencies, and consumers were perceived to be very supportive of conversion, with over half of respondents stating that these constituencies were "very supportive." The primary barrier to conversion was resistance from families, staff, and communities. Findings are discussed in light of ongoing systems change initiatives.

Conversion from Segregated Services to Supported Employment: A Continuing Challenge to the VR Service System

By: Michael West, Grant Revell, & Paul Wehman

Since 1985, the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) has funded state supported employment systems change projects under Title III of the Rehabilitation Act. The purpose of these grants was to modify existing adult day programs and service delivery systems for persons with severe disabilities to promote supported employment as an alternative vocational option (Wehman, 1989). States typically used their grants to build system capacities by such strategies as (1) increasing the number of vendored service providers, (2) enhancing the competencies of provider staff, (3) developing regional consultation services and personnel, and (4) developing data management and program evaluation systems (West, Revell, & Wehman, 1992). Title III projects have now been funded in all but a very few states and territories, representing a significant contribution toward increasing the capacities of state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) systems to expand supported employment opportunities.

Supported employment evolved from research and demonstration projects in the late 1970's and early 1980's which showed that persons with severe cognitive, physical, and behavioral impairments, typically in sheltered employment or other segregated day support programs, could work competitively if given the opportunity and necessary supports (Wehman, 1981). Those supports included intensive on-the-job training and adaptation (often referred to as a "place, then train" methodology) followed by ongoing assistance to the individual, the family, the employer and coworkers (Wehman & Kregel, 1985).

Supported employment became a service option within the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) service system via the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1986. The current regulations (Federal Register, June 24, 1992) defined the target population as individuals with the most severe disabilities, for whom competitive employment has not traditionally been an option, and for whom ongoing support services are essential to perform competitive work. Persons who are severely disabled due to mental retardation or psychosocial disabilities have been the primary recipients of supported employment services, although supported employment programs serve a diverse population of individuals with severe disabilities (Wehman & Revell, in press).

Supported employment programs have primarily been initiated within existing rehabilitation facilities that have long histories of providing center-based services for their caseloads (Revell, Wehman, Kregel, West, & Rayfield, 1994; West et al., 1992). These facilities remain the primary points of access to community-based employment services, including supported employment. Yet recent research has consistently found that supported employment programs serve only a small percentage of most facilities' service populations, with segregation the primary model for individuals in need of extended employment services.

Two studies from the Institute on Community Inclusion in Boston illustrate this point. A survey of state mental retardation and developmental disabilities funding agencies conducted by the Institute (McGaughey, Kiernan, McNally, & Gilmore, 1993) found that the majority of consumers receiving extended employment services were in sheltered employment (44%) and day activity programs (37%), with only 16% served in supported employment. A national survey of 643 vocational service providers (McGaughey, Kiernan, McNally, Gilmore, & Keith, 1995) found that in the previous year, more new consumers entered the vocational service system into segregated programs than entered supported and non-supported competitive employment combined.

Previous research has also found that facilities which are converting resources from segregated options to integrated employment are only a small proportion of all provider agencies. The Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU-RRTC) conducts a bi-annual survey of state VR and extended service (mental health, mental retardation, development disabilities) service agencies. In 1993, the most recent survey year, respondents indicated that an average of 21% of agencies which had facility-based services had downsized those services in order to increase their capacities for supported employment (Wehman & Revell, in press).

Additional evidence comes from the McGaughey et al. survey (1995) cited previously. Respondents identified their agencies' segregated and integrated service trends for the previous five years. Only 18% of agencies reported that they had reduced or discontinued their facility-based programs, with the majority expanding or keeping constant their consumers in segregated options.

The purpose of this investigation was to obtain information related to conversion from segregated to supported employment from the perspective of converting agencies. Prior research on conversion has focused principally on the extent of conversion and service utilization. This study takes a closer look at the problems, barriers, and successes of agencies in the conversion process as perceived by those agencies which have converted or are converting. The study addressed the following questions:

1. To what extent have supported employment provider agencies converted from segregated services to supported employment?
2. What barriers have been encountered in the conversion process?
3. What are the perceived levels of support for conversion from various internal and external constituencies? and
4. What variables influence agencies' decision to convert from segregated services to supported employment?

METHOD

Participants

The survey participants were representatives of 385 randomly selected supported employment provider agencies located in 40 states. The mean supported employment caseload of responding agencies was 47.6 consumers. The mean supported employment staff size was 9.0, from a total agency size of 81.2. Table 1 on the following page presents additional characteristics of these agencies, their services, and consumers. Respondents were typically coordinators of the supported employment program or executive directors of the agency.

Instrumentation

The data for this investigation were collected through the Conversion Minisurvey of the National Supported Employment Provider Survey, conducted by the VCU-RRTC. This survey was

Table 1
Characteristics of the Agencies Surveyed

1. Type of service catchment area;	
Urban	17.9%
Suburban	3.4%
Rural	38.8%
Mixed	39.8%
2. Disability groups served:	
Single disability group	32.5%
Multiple disability group	67.5%
3. Specific disability groups served (agencies serving single groups only):	
Mental retardation	69.9%
Mental illness	23.6%
Other disabilities	6.5%
4. Supported employment service models utilized:	
Individual placement only	50.4%
Group placement only	1.3%
Individual and group placement	48.3%

developed by the VCU-RRTC to elicit information via telephone on a number of issues pertaining to supported employment service delivery, such as unserved and underserved populations, funding issues, use of Social Security Work Incentives, and natural supports, as well as conversion of resources.

The main survey requested demographic information for the agency, followed by a "net"-formatted interview (Groves, 1988). A "yes" response on the main survey directed the interviewer to the appropriate minisurvey. For the purposes of the Conversion Minisurvey, the main survey item was two-part: "Does your agency offer facility-based services, such as sheltered work, in addition to supported employment? Has your agency reduced staff or funding for facility-based programs and increased that for community-based services?"

The Conversion Minisurvey, along with all elements of the National Provider Survey, were developed through multiple levels of item submission and review both within the VCU-RRTC and by external reviewers. A pilot version of the National Provider Survey was administered by telephone to representatives of 10 supported employment agencies in Virginia, who were then requested to give their impressions of the face validity and response difficulty for the items. The final version of the Conversion Minisurvey contained 14 items covering five general areas: (1) the extent to which the agency had converted resources and over what time period; (2) the agency's methods for guiding the conversion process; (3) problems and barriers to conversion; (4) support from the agency's constituencies for conversion; and (5) the impact of funding on conversion efforts.

Procedure

Sample selection. The survey sample was drawn from the population of providers of supported employment services as defined and funded under Title VI(C) of the Rehabilitation Act. State vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency staff responsible for their respective state supported employment programs were requested to provide a current list of public and private agencies vendored for supported employment services in accordance with applicable state and federal VR regulations and policies. The researchers reviewed these lists to ensure that they were recent, and appeared to contain only names of supported employment providers. Follow-up contacts were made for state lists that failed to meet these criteria. A total of 40 usable vendor lists was obtained. The survey sample was drawn through random selection with replacement. An average of 20% of confirmed providers were sampled within each state, with a maximum sample of 25%.

Telephone surveys. Because of the extensive nature of the survey, telephone surveys were conducted over the course of approximately eight

months by eight telephone interviewers. A survey script was developed that provided a consistent method for interviewers to identify appropriate respondents to the various minisurveys and determine convenient times to conduct interviews. Most surveys required multiple telephone contacts to schedule and complete, and required approximately ten minutes to two hours (average approximately one hour), depending on the number of minisurveys that were indicated from the main survey.

Data management and analysis. Quantitative data were aggregated using spreadsheet and analytical software, Microsoft Excel 5.0. Data analysis included computation of descriptive statistics, means and frequencies. Responses to open-ended items were analyzed and interpreted qualitatively, through inductive content analysis and analyst-constructed typologies (Patton, 1990).

RESULTS

Of the 385 agencies surveyed, 87 respondents indicated that their agencies had converted resources from facility-based services to supported employment, representing 22.6% of the total survey sample. Of the 385 sample, 234 (60.8%) also had facility-based services. Excluding those respondents which did not provide both facility-based and supported employment, 37.2% of agencies indicated that they had converted or were converting resources. Respondents indicated that their agencies were an average of 5.2 years into the conversion process.

To what extent have provider agencies converted resources to supported employment?

Prior to initiating conversion, agencies had an average of 82.2% of their consumers in segregated services and 17.8% in community-based services. Currently, 57.5% of consumers are in facility-based programs and 42.5% in community-based options. Agencies obligated an average of 83.9% of funds to facility-based services and 16.1% to commiunity-based services prior to initiating conversion. Currently, agencies devoted 54.1% of funds to facility-based services and 45.9% to community-based employment. Thus, over the course of their conversion efforts, agencies had increased the number of consumers in community-based employment by 24.7 percentage points and the relative proportion of funding for community-based employment by 29.8 percentage points.

As indicators of agency commitment to conversion, respondents were asked if their agencies had (1) developed a written plan to guide the conversion process, or (2) rewritten its mission statement to emphasize competitive employment. Those who responded affirmatively were 35 (42.7%) and 51 (62.2%), respectively. Almost all (98.8%) of the respondents indicated that their agencies were continuing conversion efforts.

What barriers have been encountered in the conversion process?

Respondents identified up to three significant barriers to conversion from segregated services to supported employment that they had encountered. Table 2 on the following page presents their responses. Only three (3.4%) of respondents indicated that their agency had encountered no significant problems.

The most frequently-reported barrier was perceived to be family reluctance, with over one-third (36.6%) of respondents citing this as a problem. Three other barriers were reported by more than one-fifth of the survey respondents: resistance from agency staff (24.4%); limited program funds which prohibit program growth (24.4%); and the attitudes or expectations of other segments of the community (20.7%), with local employers, service groups, and the general public included in this group.

Table 2

Significant Barriers to Conversion

Identified Barriers	Frequency	Percent
Family reluctance	30	36.6
Staff resistance	20	24.4
Limited program funds	20	24.4
Community attitudes or expectations	17	20.7
Local labor market conditions	13	15.6
Transportation difficulties	12	14.6
Staffing levels or competencies	7	8.5
Restrictions imposed by funding agencies	7	8.5

What are the levels of support for conversion from various internal and external constituencies?

Respondents rated the level of support for conversion from various agency constituencies, including the Board of Directors, staff, consumers, families, and funding agencies. Level of support could be rated as either (1) very supportive, (2) somewhat supportive, (3) not supportive, or (4) unknown. As shown in Table 3 on the following page, most respondents rated their Board, funding agencies, and consumers as very supportive. The lowest level of support was from families, with 69.1% of respondents stating that families were somewhat supportive and 13.6% stating that families were not supportive.

What variables influence agencies' decision to convert from segregated services to supported employment?

Agencies that responded positively and negatively to the conversion main survey item were compared on demographic items (see Table 1) and on other branching items from the main survey, such as use of natural supports, methods of funding, use of Social Security Work Incentives, etc. This analysis used t-tests for continuous level variables and chi-square analysis for categorical items.

One variable significantly differentiated between converting and non-converting agencies, the staff size of the agency (which included all programs operated by the facility, including residential services if operated). Converting agencies averaged 91.0 total staff and non-converting agencies 78.3 ($F=13.12$, $p<.0001$).

In addition, a separate mini-survey of funding methods requested respondents to assess the effect of the methods used by state VR and extended service agencies on their willingness to convert resources to supported employment. Responses were classified as either a statewide fixed rate (i.e., hourly, weekly, monthly), or negotiable rate based on either provider costs or the support needs of individual consumers. For both phases of service, a significantly greater percentage of respondents under fixed rates indicated that their

Table 3

Support for Conversion from Agency Constituencies

Constituency Group	Very Supportive	Somewhat Supportive	Not Supportive	Unknown/Missing
Board of Directors	56 70.0%	23 28.8%	1 1.3%	2
Agency Staff	36 44.4%	39 48.1%	6 7.4%	1
Consumers	42 51.9%	36 44.4%	3 3.7%	1
Families	14 17.3%	56 69.1%	11 13.6%	1
Funding Agencies	45 56.3%	28 35.0%	7 8.8%	2

fee-for-service method discouraged their agency from moving resources and consumers from facility-based programs to supported employment (time-limited $\chi 2 = 6.554$, df = 1, $p = .01$; extended $\chi 2 = 7.332$, df =1, $p = .007$).

DISCUSSION

National policy initiatives over the past decade have promoted integration, self-determination, and competitive employment for individuals with disabilities. Those initiatives include the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and systems change funding by the RSA. Still, integrated and segregated vocational service options continue to compete for limited service funds and consumers. Within those facilities that offer both options, segregated services remain the clear option of choice.

According to Mank (1994), this situation stems from conflicting national policies in vocational services; the same programs that encourage and fund integrated employment also fund segregated services. States and provider agencies that are not committed to expansion of integrated employment opportunities have little incentive to do so. Because of the perceived risks of community-based employment, many provider agencies maintain small supported employment programs in comparison to facility-based services, thereby severely limiting access to programs such as supported employment (West, 1995). The VCU-RRTC National Supported Employment Provider Survey confirms this; on average, supported

employment staff were only 11% of their agency total staff, responsible for services to 43% of their agencies' caseloads.

It is noteworthy that no variables emerged, other than the number of staff of the facility and funding method, which differentiated between converting and non-converting agencies. One might suspect that other demographic and programmatic variables, such as community type (urban, rural) and consumer groups served, might influence the decision to pursue conversion; however, that does not appear to be the case. Larger facilities might have more sources or income than smaller facilities, and therefore are able to absorb the initial personnel costs of expanding supported employment staff. Additionally, negotiable fee-for-service agreements may also be an incentive to expand programs. Still, apart from anecdotal case studies (Murphy & Rogan, 1995), there is little empirical knowledge of the factors that persuade and enable facilities to shift resources, consumers, and programmatic focus.

The findings of this survey confirm prior research on systems change from segregated to supported employment. Only slightly better than one-third of agencies (37.2%) offering both facility-based programs and supported employment indicated that they had downsized their segregated programs and expanded supported employment services, with almost two-thirds of agencies maintaining or increasing their levels of facility-based services. Moreover, for those which had made conversion efforts, the majority of consumers and agency funds remained within the facility-based programs after an average of five years of conversion efforts. Although a small number of agencies had made complete conversion from segregated to supported employment and almost all indicated that they were continuing their conversion efforts, most agencies had undoubtedly found conversion to be a lengthy and difficult endeavor.

Many respondents reported that the major barriers they had encountered were internal (i.e., families, staff, budgetary). Another frequently reported barrier was the prevailing community attitudes, including the general public, leaders, and local industries. These findings underscore the conflicts which arise, both within the facility and the community, when philosophical and programmatic changes are attempted. Agency staff can view conversion as a threat to their own employment, and possibly as a threat to the individuals they serve. Local industries can view downsizing in-house work as a threat to the contractual relationships they have developed with the facility.

It is notable that respondents indicated that the most supportive constituencies are the agency's Board, consumers, and funding agencies, with families of consumers the least supportive. Clearly, consumers want more opportunities for accessing community-based employment. However, family members can be powerful advocates for their members with disabilities, and in the vocational arena they are perceived by this survey's respondents to be less than enthusiastic about movement away from sheltered employment and day services. It should be noted, however, that respondents indicated the level of perceived support from these constituencies, based on their experiences with them. Those agencies which have successfully converted all or most of their resources to community-based programs have many lessons to teach those which wish to convert in the area of alleviating fears and reluctance of families, staff, and communities.

What do the findings of this survey suggest regarding future efforts at systems change? First, federal funding of systems change projects have resulted in a substantial number of rehabilitation facilities converting staff and other resources (to some degree) in order to increase supported employment opportunities. It is remarkable that over one-third of the respondents to this survey have been able to shift a significant amount of their

resources to supported employment in a relatively short time period, and during a very difficult fiscal period. Still, as others have noted (Mank, 1994; Wehman & Kregel, 1995), the degree of change is not that which was hoped for in the 1980s. Segregated vocational services continue to be the predominant mode of service for individuals in need of extended employment support. Even though the numbers of supported employment consumers and providers have increased dramatically since the inception of the program (Wehman & Revell, in press) so, too, have those for facility-based programs. It is possible that these initiatives have resulted in new providers offering only supported employment; still, in most communities existing facilities are the only avenue of access to supported employment and for the most part they remain committed to segregated services.

Second, the findings suggest that systems change, for the most part, may be a war of attrition rather than a revolution. Many families, rehabilitation facilities, and communities have invested deeply, financially and emotionally, in segregated programs and resist efforts to downsize or eliminate them. For those facilities, the movement toward competitive employment as the option of choice will be long and arduous, and for many perhaps even unattainable. Achieving this goal for consumers requires a much greater overhaul in the way that programs deliver services. True systems change may come about, not from changeover of existing facilities, but from an influx of new stand-alone supported employment providers and new consumers coming into the system who, along with their families, want and expect more than a slot in the workshop or day support program.

Finally, the findings suggest that new methods for increasing supported employment systems capacity may be needed. Systems change funding has resulted in some change, but in order to reach the next plateau new initiatives will probably be required. For example, it has been suggested that state VR agencies can promote conversion to supported employment through such strategeis as fiscal incentives, caps on segregated program slots, changes in licensure and regulatory standards, and increased training and technical assistance (Mank, 1994; McGaughey et al., 1995; Wehman & Kregel, 1995). Each of these strategies has been initiated in limited numbers of states with limited results. But, as Weiner-Zivolich and Zivolich (Weiner-Zivolich & Zivolich, 1995) write:

Individuals with disabilities should no longer have to wait in segregation, unemployment, welfare, and poverty, if [facility] management personnel cannot make the required behavioral and managerial changes to implement integrated employment services....Persons with disabilities consistently have stated that they want jobs. Why do they continue to wait, 10 years later, for the segregation industry to hear and respond to this request? Why do we continue to provide "changeover" consultation for sheltered workshops to help them sort through their own perceived barriers to supported employment integration? (p. 311)

Weiner-Zivolich and Zivolich (1995) suggest that the changeover strategy has reached the limits of efficacy and cost-effectiveness. They offer an alternative method that focuses on funding start-up of supported employment within for-profit businesses. We offer other strategies which might spur true systems change.

Re-Targeting Systems Change Funding

RSA and state VR demonstration and start-up funding can be re-directed to spur the development of new stand-alone supported employment vendors. These vendors, unlike existing rehabilitation facilities, would be unencumbered by histories of segregated service and values. They can also be targeted to provide access to supported employment in areas where facility-based programs have failed to do so to any substantive degree.

Revising State VR and MR/DD Funding Systems

Another strategy is to initiate funding methods that maximize consumer choice. Many community rehabilitation programs are funded through contracts that establish capacities for categories of services. For example, a contract might establish 40 facility-based habilitation/ employment slots within a community rehabilitation program. The program is then staffed to serve the individuals in those slots. The service money flows directly from the funding agency to the service agency to fund a fixed-cost program, with little or no flexibility to move those funds to other options. This system effectively predetermines the number of individuals with disabilities who will have the option of moving into community-based employment during the course of the year.

An alternative funding method is a voucher system where the service funds flow from the funding agency to a service pool from which funds can be drawn based on consumers' specific needs and choices. This funding strategy would foster a community service array that is more responsive to the consumer, rather than to the service traditions or limits of the facility-based service industry. Given the predominant choice of persons with disabilities to live and work in community integrated settings (Test, Hinson, Solow, & Keul, 1993), the voucher strategy would certainly leverage increasing numbers of new providers, and perhaps facility conversion as well.

Reducing Risks of Job Loss

In addition to these systems change efforts, new strategies are needed to reduce families' fears of competitive employment, or more often, the risk of loss of competitive employment. McGaughey et al. (1995) and West (1995) have noted that a significant barrier to systems change is the use of supported employment to reduce waiting lists for segregated programs. That is, as individuals move from the facility into supported employment, their program slots are filled from the facility's waiting list. Families have reasonable fears that if a competitive placement fails their son or daughter will have no day services until a new competitive placement is made. State mental retardation, developmental disability, and mental health agencies can help to alleviate their fears by tying funding to individuals rather than program slots. Thus, individuals in supported employment who are between jobs could be provided alternative types of day services.

Reducing Economic Disincentives to Consumers and Families

New policy initiatives are also needed to reverse the economic disincentives to employment for recipients of Social Security Disability programs and their families (Bowe, 1993). According to recent data from RSA, the majority of VR sheltered workshop cases receive either Disability Insurance (DI), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), or both (Wehman, West, & Kane, 1997). The potential loss of cash benefits and health care received through these programs is a strong disincentive to competitive employment consumers and their families. While a number of work incentives have been initiated to encourage recipients to enter or reenter the work force, few actually do so and fewer still earn enough to discontinue benefits (U.S. General Accounting Office, April, 1996).

One strategy would be to amend the Internal Revenue tax code to provide credits for disabled workers at a certain earnings threshold, much like the Earned Income Tax Credit for low-income families, and to allow all workers with severe disabilities the additional deduction currently available for wage earners with visual impairments. In addition, RSA and state VR systems can initiate incentive programs which pay bonuses to vendors that place consumers into full-time positions with health care benefits. Incentive systems are already being initiated in some states, such as South Dakota. While many individuals

with severe disabilities are unable to work full-time because of their disabilities, incentive programs would reward providers who assist those who can work full-time to do so.

CONCLUSION

There should be no doubt that RSA systems change funding has had a significant impact on the growth of state investment in supported employment and that thousands of individuals with severe disabilities have benefitted. However, without alternatives to facility-based programs and efforts to address the concerns of families, the mandates of the Rehabilitation Act -- for choice, self-determination, and competitive employment as the option of choice -- will remain unfulfilled promises for the majority of individuals with severe disabilities.

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Abstract

This article reports findings from a survey of 385 supported employment provider agencies on their use of two Social Security Work Incentives, the Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS) and Impairment-Related Work Expenses (IRWE). Results indicated that PASSes and IRWEs are used by supported employment consumers at rates far above that of the SSA beneficiary population. PASS and IRWE approval rates were reported to be high, and respondents generally reported few problems in accessing these supports. Set-aside funds were predominantly used to purchase transportation, supported employment services, work equipment and supplies, and other needed supports and services. Findings are discussed in light of reports by the U.S. General Accounting Office that have found mismanagement and misuse of SSA Work Incentives.

USE OF SOCIAL SECURITY WORK INCENTIVES BY SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES AND CONSUMERS: FINDINGS FROM A NATIONAL SURVEY

By: Michael West, Paul Wehman, & Grant Revell

Perhaps the most tangible and imposing barrier to employment for persons with disabilities is potential loss of income assistance and health care through programs administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA) and the Health Care Financing Administration. As Bowe (1993) notes, the two major disability-related programs operated by SSA, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Disability Insurance (DI), are "dependence-oriented." Individuals who are in need of assistance must prove themselves to be incapable of engaging in Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA), currently determined by earnings of over $500 per month. Fear of losing benefits, particularly medical coverage under Medicaid (often received due to eligibility for SSI) or Medicare (DI), persuades most beneficiaries to limit their earnings or, more commonly, not enter the labor market at all.

Bowe (1993) has underscored the extent of these economic disincentives for employment using U.S. Census data. Despite empowering legislation in employment and education, between the 1970 and 1990 Census surveys the percentage of individuals with disabilities of working age who were employed declined; a larger percentage are out of the labor force (not employed or seeking employment); and a larger percentage of those out of the labor force consider themselves unable to work because of their disabilities.

To counteract the economic disincentives to employment inherent within the SSI and DI programs, Congress has authorized a number of work incentives. As examples, DI beneficiaries may engage in a trial work period, and may retain eligibility without the need for reapplication; SSI recipients can receive payments even when they engage in SGA (SSA, 1992). Two SSA work incentives are designed to exclude beneficiaries' income from being counted when determining benefits. These are the Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS) and Impairment-Related Work Expenses (IRWE). Individuals receiving either SSI or DI are eligible for IRWEs, while only those receiving SSI are eligible for PASSes.

Under a PASS, earned or unearned income is set aside for current or future expenses of training, equipment, services, or supports which are related to a specified employment goal (Emmons, 1995; Prero, 1993; Rheinheimer, VanCovern, Green, Revell, & Inge, January 1993). Model plans have been presented in the literature (Emmons, 1995) and by the SSA (SSA, 1991), and a draft standard form has been developed by SSA and is awaiting approval. A PASS may be written to be in effect for up to 18 months, with the possibility for extension for an additional 18 months. Extension for a fourth year is possible if the PASS includes completion of a multi-year educational program. The PASS terminates when either (1) the employment goal is reached, (2) the recipient ceases to comply with the PASS, or (3) the maximum time period elapses (Prero, 1993). PASSes require prior approval by SSA.

Under the IRWE program, an individual can exclude from his or her earnings any expenditures that are required to become employed, and

which are directly related to the individual's disability. Unlike the PASS, the IRWE does not require a written plan and has no time limitations, but does require a monthly accounting of impairment-related work expenses which are approved by the SSA caseworker. The exclusion of income under a PASS can effectively compensate the SSI recipient in full for qualified expenses, and under IRWE for half the expenditure. This is because the IRWE exclusion is figured before the standard exclusion of half of earned income. Thus, half the amount excluded as an IRWE would have been excluded anyway (Prero, 1993).

Both the PASS and IRWE programs allow potential SSA beneficiaries to exclude income in order to become eligible for SSI or DI, and the PASS regulations allow the SSI recipient to include any cost for assistance in developing the plan. These provisions would appear to offer SSI and DI beneficiaries incentives to use the PASS and IRWE programs, and encourage return to work by increasing allowable earnings without the threat of loss of benefits.

However, the PASS and IRWE programs appear to be vastly underutilized within the SSI and DI programs (U.S. Government Accounting Office [US GAO], July 1995). The SSA reports that less than 3% of working SSI recipients have participated in the PASS program, and only about 9% of SSI/DI recipients who are working are using IRWEs (SSA, 1993). A recent report by the U.S. General Accounting Office (US GAO, July, 1995) states flatly that SSA disability programs "return virtually no one to work" (p. 11).

PASSes and IRWEs have been proposed as alternative means of financing long-term employment support needs for individuals with severe disabilities in supported employment (Ford, 1995; Prero, 1993; Rheinheimer et al., January 1993). Supported employment combines time-limited training and adjustment services funded through the Vocational Rehabilitation service system, followed by extended support services typically funded through another source, such as state mental health or developmental disability agencies. Under a PASS, for example, an SSI recipient can pay for his or her own time-limited services until an employment goal, such as a level of productivity or a decreased need for on-the-job support, is reached (Prero, 1993). An IRWE can be used to cover costs of adaptive equipment, services such as job coaching, or supports such as specialized transportation, which the individual requires.

Despite increasing attention to the use of PASSes and IRWEs in supported employment programs, recent evidence indicates that, as in the SSI and DI programs as a whole, these incentives are underutilized by supported employment programs and consumers (Griffin, Test, Dalton, & Wood, 1995; Dalton, Test, Dotson, & Beroth, 1995). Other than case examples (Emmons, 1995; Rheinheimer et al., January 1993), no information is available on how set-aside income is utilized by individuals with disabilities or supported employment agencies. Furthermore, no research has addressed such issues as PASS and IRWE approval rates by SSA caseworkers, consumer involvement in the process, and barriers encountered by beneficiaries and supported employment agencies in utilizing PASSes and IRWEs. Addressing these questions will empower persons with disabilities and support agencies in accessing this resource more effectively. This study was initiated for that purpose. The specific questions addressed by the study are:

1. To what extent are PASSes and IRWEs used to finance supports and services for individuals in supported employment programs?
2. What specific supports and services are being financed for supported employment participants through PASSes and IRWEs?
3. To what extent are supported employment consumers involved in planning and implementation of PASSes and IRWEs? and

4. What are the problems and barriers encountered by supported employment consumers and provider agencies in utilizing PASSes and IRWEs?

METHOD

Participants

The survey participants were representatives of 385 randomly selected supported employment provider agencies located in 40 states. The mean supported employment caseload of responding agencies was 47.6 consumers. The mean supported employment staff size was 9.0, from a mean total agency staff size of 81.2. Additional characteristics of these agencies, their services, and consumers are presented below in Table 1. Respondents were typically coordinators of the supported employment program or executive directors of the agency.

Table 1
Characteristics of the Agencies Surveyed

1. Type of service catchment area:	
Urban	17.9%
Suburban	3.4%
Rural	38.8%
Mixed	39.8%
2. Disability groups served:	
Single disability group	32.5%
Multiple disability group	67.5%
3. Specific disability groups served (agencies serving single groups only):	
Mental retardation	69.9%
Mental illness	23.6%
Other disabilities	6.5%
4. Supported employment service models utilized:	
Individual placement only	50.4%
Group placement only	1.3%
Individual and group placement	48.3%

Instrumentation

The data for this investigation were collected through the PASS/IRWE Minisurvey of the National Supported Employment Provider Survey, conducted by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU-RRTC). The National Provider Survey was developed by the VCU-RRTC to elicit information via telephone on a number of issues pertaining to supported employment service delivery, such as unserved and underserved populations, use of natural supports, funding for time-limited and extended services, and use of Social Security Work Incentives.

The initial survey requested demographic information as described previously, followed by a single item pertaining to each of the major issues. A "yes" response on the main survey indicated that the appropriate minisurvey should be completed. For the purposes of Social Security Work Incentives, the main survey item was the following: "To your knowledge, have individuals served by your agency utilized either PASS plans (Plans for Achieving Self-Support) or IRWEs (Impairment-Related Work Expenses) to assist them in achieving their supported employment goals?"

The PASS/IRWE Minisurvey, as all elements of the National Provider Survey, were developed through multiple levels of item submission and review both internally and externally. A pilot version of the National Provider Survey was administered by telephone to representatives of 10 supported employment agencies in Virginia, who were then requested to give their impressions of the face validity and response difficulty for the items. The final version of the PASS/IRWE Minisurvey contained 12 items relating to (1) raw number of PASSes and IRWEs utilized in the past year and in relation to the agency's overall supported employment caseload; (2) individuals who were responsible for developing PASSes and IRWEs for the respondent's caseload; (3) consumer involvement in various aspects of developing

PASSes and IRWEs; (4) examples of how PASSes and IRWEs were used for supported employment consumers; and (5) problems encountered in using PASSes and IRWEs for their supported employment clients.

Procedure

Sample selection. The survey sample was drawn from the population of providers of supported employment services as defined and funded under Title VI(C) of the Rehabilitation Act. State vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency staff responsible for their respective state supported employment programs were contacted and requested to provide a current list of public and private agencies vendored for supported employment services in accordance with applicable state and federal VR regulations and policies. The lists were reviewed upon receipt to insure that they were of recent origin, and appeared to contain only names of providers of supported employment. Follow-up contacts for clarification were made for state lists that failed to meet these criteria.

Several states were unable to provide vendor lists for various reasons. For example, some states utilize VR Counselors for delivery of time-limited services rather than vendored agencies, then transition those cases to extended service provider agencies funded through other state funds. Other states were unable to provide lists due to personnel or time constraints. A total of 40 usable vendor lists were obtained for sampling.

The survey sample was completed through random selection with replacement. An average of 20% of confirmed providers were sampled, with sample sizes ranging from a minimum sample of 10% to a maximum sample of 25% per state.

Telephone surveys. Because of the extensive nature of the survey, telephone surveys were conducted over the course of approximately eight months by eight telephone interviewers. A survey script was developed that provided a consistent method for interviewers to identify appropriate respondents to the various minisurveys and determine convenient times to conduct the interviews. Most surveys required multiple telephone contacts to schedule and complete, and required from approximately 10 minutes to 2 hours, depending on the number of minisurveys that were indicated from the main survey.

Data management and analysis. Quantitative data were aggregated using spreadsheet and analytical software, Microsoft Excel 5.0. Data analysis included computation of descriptive statistics, means and frequencies. Responses to open-ended items were analyzed and interpreted qualitatively, through inductive content analysis and analyst-constructed typologies (Patton, 1990), which are defined as "patterns, categories, and themes for which a typology can be constructed to elucidate variations and contrasts in activities, participants, and/or staff" (p. 309).

RESULTS

To what extent are PASSes and IRWEs used to finance supports and services for individuals in supported employment programs?

Of the 385 supported employment agencies surveyed, 223 (57.9%) indicated that they had used PASSes or IRWEs for their supported employment consumers in the previous year. These agencies had written an average of 5.1 PASSes and assisted 4.1 of their consumers with IRWEs, representing 13.3% and 10.2% of their caseloads respectively. Respondents reported that 90.4% of PASSes had been approved by SSA caseworkers, and that 82.8% of IRWEs had been approved. Over three-fourths of the respondents (76.0%) reported that they had an individual on staff who was responsible for assisting their consumers with PASSes, and nearly as many (70.0%) had an

individual on staff responsible for assisting consumers with IRWEs. The remainder relied upon paid consultants, VR Counselors, or SSA caseworkers to assist their consumers in accessing work incentives.

What specific supports and services are being financed for supported employment participants through PASSes and IRWEs?

Respondents were requested to provide up to two examples for which PASSes and/or IRWEs had been utilized. Tables 2 and 3 present summaries of those responses. Overwhelmingly, respondents indicated that transportation was the primary PASS and IRWE objective. Other commonly reported PASS and IRWE objectives included the purchase of supported employment services, work equipment and supplies, adaptive equipment, and other specialized services.

Table 2
Services and Supports Funded by PASSes

Purchases	Percent of Respondents Reporting
Transportation	45.3%
Supported employment services	19.2%
Work tools, equipment, clothing	7.9%
Employment-related services	7.5%
Adaptive equipment	6.0%
Non-employment related services	4.5%
Personal assistant	3.8%
Environmental modification	2.6%
Non-employment related goods	1.1%
Other	2.3%

Table 3
Services and Supports Funded by PASSes

Purchases	Percent of Respondents Reporting
Transportation	51.7%
Work tools, equipment, clothing	8.2%
Supported employment services	8.1%
Adaptive equipment	7.5%
Non-employment related services	6.8%
Other employment related services	5.4%
Non-employment related services	4.8%
Environmental modifications	4.8%
Personal assistant	2.7%
Payment to coworkers	0.7%
Other	1.4%

To what extent are supported employment consumers involved in planning and implementation of PASSes and IRWEs?

Respondents estimated that an average of 88.5% of their consumers were involved in determining objectives for their PASSes and IRWEs. Over two-thirds (67.4%) were involved in completing PASSes and IRWE applications. However, only 39.9% were involved in submitting PASSes and IRWEs and following-up on their progress through the approval process.

What are the problems and barriers encountered by supported employment consumers and provider agencies in utilizing PASSes and IRWEs?

Respondents were allowed to describe up to three problems and barriers they had experienced in using PASSes and IRWEs in their supported employment programs, which were then coded post

hoc. Over one-third (38%) of respondents stated that they had experienced no problems in using the programs. Table 4 presents a summary of problems as reported for this item.

Table 4
Services and Supports Funded by PASSes

Problem Area	Percent of Respondents Reporting
Approval process takes too long	15.0%
Consumer/family discontinue	9.2%
Paperwork too extensive or difficult	8.2%
Approval rates too low	7.8%
Consumer needs don't match allowable expenses	6.8%
Allowable sheltered income too low to make worthwhile	5.5%

DISCUSSION

As this article goes to press, SSA has transferred responsibility for PASS decisions to its central office and revising regulations. The SSA has taken this action in large part because of the problems highlighted by the US GAO's reports on SSA Work Incentives. The findings from this survey provide a number of counterpoints to the US GAO reports, and these will be discussed here.

First, the survey found that over half of supported employment agencies utilized the PASS and IRWE programs for their consumers. Within the past year, they had written PASSes and documented IRWEs for 13.3% and 10.2% of their caseloads, respectively. While these percentages may seem small, they exceed the proportionate use of work incentives among working SSA claimants as a group, and only represent PASSes and IRWEs written over the past year. Thus, PASSes and IRWEs appear to be used to a significant degree by supported employment agencies and consumers. Moreover, the findings indicate that consumers are involved to a significant degree in choosing PASS/IRWE objectives and completing the necessary forms.

Over one-third of respondents (38%) stated that they had experienced no problems in accessing PASSes and IRWEs. However, 62% of responding agencies reported at least one problem in accessing these work incentives for their consumers. This tends to support the lack of consistency of service and delays documented in the US GAO report on the PASS program, since most of the reported problems tended to involve administrative processes within SSA for submission and approval (refer to Table 4).

It is noteworthy that 7.8% of respondents indicated that low approval rates were a problem, while approval rates averaged 90.4% for PASSes and 82.8% for IRWEs. While most respondents indicated that all of their consumers' PASSes and IRWEs were approved by SSA, approximately 10% reported approval rates below 75% and approximately 6% reported approval rates from 0% to 50%. Thus, the two findings are consistent within the context of the study and with the US GAO report which cited variable PASS approval rates among SSA offices and caseworkers.

Transportation was reported to be a major objective for PASSes and IRWEs among the survey respondents. However, in contrast to the US GAO report, most respondents indicated that funds were being used to purchase transportation services rather than vehicles. These services included paratransit, public transportation, and ride-sharing with coworkers. This finding should be taken somewhat cautiously, in that respondents

were requested for examples of common PASS and IRWE objectives, and not asked for the percentage of PASSes or IRWEs used to purchase services in comparison to that used to purchase vehicles. However, it is consistent with the supported employment population as a whole and the populations served by the respondents to infer that transportation services outweigh vehicles as primary PASS and IRWE expenditures.

Another issue addressed by the US GAO (US GAO, February, 1996) was the practice of vocational service providers assisting their consumers to write PASSes in order to purchase the services which they provide. The report specifically cited the example of supported employment agencies using PASSes to fund job coaching services. The report termed this practice a "conflict of interest" (p. 37) with "potential for abuse" (p. 39). This raises two questions: (1) Should supported employment agencies be allowed to use PASSes or IRWEs to fund services? and (2) If so, who should assist the consumer to write and submit the PASS or IRWE?

Regarding the first question, many potential supported employment candidates do not have access to extended service funding streams due to funding source restrictions or other factors, such as lack of service providers in their area of residence (West, Revell, & Wehman, 1992). A PASS or IRWE can be used to set aside earnings for that purpose through a direct payment to a supported employment provider agency (Rheinheimer et al., January 1993). In addition, sustained growth in the supported employment program has strained many state funding systems beyond their capacities to support individuals currently in the program and those who are eligible yet unserved (Wehman, Revell, & Kregel, 1995; Wehman & Kregel, 1995). PASSes and IRWEs offer consumers an alternative means of obtaining services when public funds earmarked for services are insufficient.

Regarding the second question, this survey found that the majority of PASSes and IRWEs were handled within the agency by the job coach, program coordinator, or other staff person. The survey did not address whether or not the cost of assisting the consumer was typically included in the PASS or IRWE in addition to the fees for supported employment services. When set-aside funds are to be used to purchase services, consumers can and should be given the option of going through a third-party preparer based on information regarding the availability of the service, approval rates, and fees.

SSA has begun several initiatives to increase the number of DI beneficiaries and SSI recipients who enter or reenter the workforce and might eventually leave the disability rolls. One such initiative is the use of alternative service providers, i.e., funded directly from SSA rather than through the Vocational Rehabilitation system. While work incentives such as PASS and IRWE have been underutilized in the past, perhaps the rate of use will increase as the alternative provider system opens up more avenues and opportunities to access needed services, including supported employment.

In conclusion, this survey indicates that PASSes and IRWEs are being used by supported employment providers and consumers for necessary supports and services to obtain and maintain employment. The assistance of the provider agency in the use of PASSes and IRWEs to set aside funds for services, assuming the individual chooses to use funds for that purpose, is not an abuse of the system. Rather, it enables individuals to access services who might not otherwise be able to do so.

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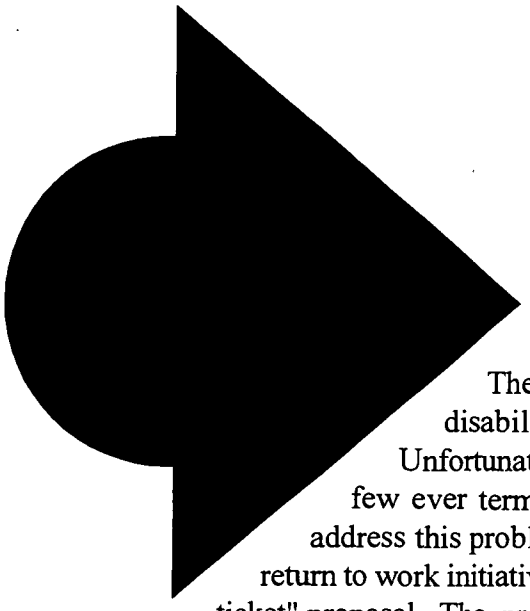

Abstract

The number of individuals receiving benefits through Social Security disability programs (SSI and SSDI) has grown over the past decade. Unfortunately, once individuals become eligible for disability benefits, very few ever terminate Socials Security participation by returning to work. To address this problem, the Social Security Administration has developed several return to work initiatives, including an alternate provider program and a "return to work ticket" proposal. The present manuscript addresses the important role local provider agencies will play in these return to work initiatives and to recommend specific incentives that will enable local provider agencies to assist SSI/SSDI recipients to obtain employment and exit the disability rolls.

PROVIDER INCENTIVES AND RETURN TO WORK: STRATEGIES FOR MAXIMIZING SUCCESS

By: John Kregel, Paul Wehman, & Grant Revell

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, the number of individuals entering the SSA beneficiary rolls has grown at an alarming rate (National Academy of Social Insurance, 1996b). Even more disconcerting is the fact that during the same period, the number of persons leaving the disability benefit rolls through return to work declined. To put the problem in perspective, a recent analysis by the Office of the Actuary of the Social Security Administration (SSA) indicates that approximately 7,000 Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) recipients each year terminate Social Security Trust Fund participation by returning to work. The individuals returning to work constitute only 0.18 percent of the total number of SSDI recipients (SSA, 1995). These statistics point to the clear lack of employment incentives in current disability benefit policy and programs, as well as the challenges faced by of rehabilitation and other employment programs to meet the needs of these individuals.

Continued dependence on disability benefits denies persons with disabilities the opportunity to exercise their rights to live and work in the community as called for by the 1992 Americans with Disabilities Act (P.L. 101-336) and places tremendous financial pressure on the Social Security Trust Fund. These concerns have generated a comprehensive public and private sector review of Social Security disability benefit programs. The priority for this review is to create or strengthen incentives that will assist a greater number benefit recipients achieve stable employment, reduce or eliminate their need for disability benefits, and thereby generate a savings in payments through the Social Security Trust Fund. Included in this broad based review is a focus on (a) whether rehabilitation and work can be emphasized without greatly expanding costs to the Trust Fund or weakening the rights of persons with a disability who cannot work and (b) changes that would encourage beneficiaries to use their abilities in employment (NASI, 1996a).

Range and Content of Current Return to Work Proposals

A wide array of strategies are being proposed to encourage and support disability beneficiaries and recipients as they attempt to return to work. These proposals address key areas such as modifications to the tax code, changes in current work incentive programs, health care considerations of persons with disabilities, and compensation for costs involved in acquiring the personal assistance necessary for some individuals with a disabilities to return to work. In addition, a number of proposals payment strategies to provide return to work services and supports through employment service provider agencies.

The National Academy of Social Insurance (NASI, 1996a), through its Disability Policy Panel, has proposed the concept of a Return to Work Ticket. Under this proposal, Social Security Trust Fund for monies would be used to pay providers of employment services. The benefit recipient would receive a return to work ticket that would commit the SSA to making payments to the agency providing the services that result in employment. SSA would make payments after the recipient successfully maintains employment and terminates from the disability benefit rolls. The annual payments to the employment service agencies would be a percentage of the savings to the Trust Fund over a specified number of years.

In addition to the NASI Return to Work Ticket proposal, other approaches to provider incentives have also been discussed. The Return to Work Group, a partnership of individuals with disabilities, advocates, and service providers, has developed an alternative proposal which adds certain milestone payments for key steps in the employment process during the initial year of service to shorten the period between provision of services and payment through the RTW Ticket. SSA direct funding of employment service agencies would be a substantial change from its current funding of state vocational rehabilitation agencies to provide and/or acquire employment services for benefit recipients, a strategy that has a history of very limited success (NASI, 1996b).

Another significant attempt to promote the role of local service providers in the rehabilitation and employment of SSA beneficiaries and recipients is the SSA Vocational Rehabilitation Payment Program. This program will enlist the assistance of local provider agencies (i.e. alternate participants) to provide rehabilitation and employment services to beneficiaries and recipients not being served by state vocational rehabilitation agencies. Alternate participants would be responsible for recruiting beneficiaries referred through the program, assessing their need for employment supports, planning the package of services that will enable them to obtain and maintain employment, and assisting them to achieve SGA for a period of nine months. The alternate participant would receive no reimbursement for services provided until the individual has been employed for the nine month period, at which time the alternate participant would receive full payment for services provided through a fixed fee payment system specified in a previously approved cost containment proposal.

The return to work proposals also emphasize adjusting provisions within the SSA disability benefit program for the purpose of helping beneficiaries to understand the program and how employment is feasible for them, supporting employment service agencies as key sources of information for facilitating return to work by beneficiaries, and improving the timeliness of responses by SSA to beneficiaries attempting to work. In summary, the return to work strategies being proposed are broad based and recognize the complex nature of the difficulties faced by SSA beneficiaries in considering employment that will enable them to leave the dependence of the SSA beneficiary rolls.

Concerns Regarding Return to Work Proposals

While formal analyses of the potential impact of the RTW Ticket program and Vocational Rehabilitation Payment Program on public and private provider agencies are in their early stages, there are indications that some members of the provider community have greeted the proposal with skepticism. Among the concerns frequently expressed is that the RTW Ticket and Alternate Participant payment proposals outlined above will only assist a very small number of disability benefit recipients to successfully attain employment and leave the beneficiary rolls. There is a fear that the only individuals who will benefit are persons who have a marketable skill, are able to work at or close

to full time, and who will require only minimal supports.

Another concern expressed regarding the return to work proposals is the notion that only highly capitalized public agencies or larger private agencies will be able to participate in the program. The return to work ticket strategy places the full financial risk on the service provider because SSA will only make payments that are a percentage of savings generated by terminations from the Trust Fund. In the alternate participant program, the local provider agency is required to "front" the cost of providing services for many months prior to receiving reimbursement. It is important to recognize the financial risk involved. There are substantial service dollars involved in successfully assisting individuals with significant disabilities enter and retain competitive employment. The delayed timeline for payments and the "success only" payment structure potentially creates a funding environment that eliminates participation by a number of provider agencies, thus limiting the choices available in selecting service providers. Among the concerns that have been expressed are the following:

- Individuals who are perceived as being too challenging (costly) to serve may not have access to an employment alternative that would greatly enhance their chances of reducing their dependence on government supports and returning to the competitive work force.
- The amount of fiscal and programmatic resources that an alternate participant will expend on an individual prior to receiving reimbursement will lead to the provider agency "pressuring" the individual to remain in an unsatisfactory employment setting rather than jeopardizing the agency's potential reimbursement.

Recognizing the tremendous potential advantages of the RTW Ticket and alternate participant proposals from both the perspective of the individual with a disability and the Trust Fund, every effort must be made to insure that the program is designed in such a way to (1) maximize the number of individuals able to access employment and leave the beneficiary rolls, and (2) solicit participation by a diverse array of potential provider organizations. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to analyze the factors influencing the potential success of incentives designed to assist disability benefit recipients return to work through the assistance of employment service organizations.

METHOD

In an effort to gain input from employment service agencies regarding the return to work proposals, the Social Security Administration asked the Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment (VCU-RRTC) to analyze the proposals. To this end, the VCU-RRTC convened a provider incentive work group. The purpose and intended outcomes of the work group were: (a) To constructively analyze return to work proposals to determine their potential impact on local employment service provider agencies; (b) To recommend specific provider incentives that will enable local provider agencies to assist SSI/SSDI recipients to obtain employment and leave the Trust Fund rolls; and (c) To identify specific ways to inform the national provider network of current efforts to promote employment among SSI/SSDI recipients. The work group consisted of individuals experienced in managing and administering the provision of employment services, and also assisting disability benefit recipients to understand the relationship between employment and benefits. It reflected both the public and private sector perspectives.

Of the twelve member panel, five individuals were current administrators of

employment service organizations, and a sixth member was a former administrator who has more recently provided training and technical assistance regarding Social Security work incentives and also the delivery of employment services leading to community integrated outcomes. The provider agency administrators represented a cross-section of programs ranging from large, multi-dimensional organizations with an array of service options, including contracts through the National Industries for the Severely Handicapped (NISH), to small agencies specializing in individual job placements in the community with ongoing supports. All of the provider agency administrators had direct experience in attempting to assist disability benefit recipients enter employment. Two of the panel members worked for national disability constituent organizations in Washington representing the interests and concerns of (a) employment service agencies and (b) persons with disabilities. The remaining panel members worked directly with the content and impact of the Social Security disability benefits program from their perspective as employees of the federal Department of Education, university-based research centers, or private consultants.

The panel met in Leesburg, Virginia on April 17, 1996 and responded to the following five questions through a process where a panel member would frame the discussion around each questions through an initial presentation followed by an open group discussion. The questions discussed are as follows:

1. What are the challenges currently facing public and private provider agencies attempting to provide employment services to SSA beneficiaries? What are the implications of the NASI recommendations for reducing the number of SSA beneficiaries on these agencies providing employment services to individuals with disabilities?
2. What is the potential differential impact of the NASI recommendations on agencies providing services to certain groups of individuals within the overall SSA beneficiary populations, such as persons with a psychiatric disability?
3. How can the NASI Return to Work Ticket and alternate participant proposals be designed and implemented to insure maximum consumer choice and control of service provision?
4. The NASI Return to Work Ticket proposal is designed to insure that providers bear the financial risk by providing services first and being paid later, according to their results. How would this type of approach affect the strategies used by various types of agencies (large/small, public/private, profit/non-profit) to implement the RTW program?
5. What are the non-economic factors (e.g. referral and recruitment procedures, quality assurance, etc.) that impact a provider agency's ability to provide services to individuals with a disability? What, if any, other type of incentives could be provided that would encourage local agencies to participate in programs designed to reduce the number of SSA beneficiaries?

These questions served as a framework for the panel to analyze the factors influencing the potential success of provider incentives designed to assist SSA beneficiaries return to work. The panel members were also asked to identify organizations that should be targeted in the dissemination of information nationally to inform and educate local provider agencies on the return to work proposals and encourage their participation as the proposals are further developed.

After the initial set of results was reviewed by panel members and individuals throughout the country, a significant amount of feedback was received regarding the need to formulate an approach to evaluating the potential efficacy of the return to work proposals. To this end, the final section of this report attempts to summarize the major areas to consider when evaluating the return to work proposals.

RESULTS

The results of the work group's efforts are summarized below. Concerns addressed by the members included promoting consumer choice and empowerment, expanding access to rehabilitation services, encouraging competition and innovation among service providers, implementing an outcome based system that pays providers for employment results that reduce benefit expenditures, and improving administrative efficiency.

Provider incentive programs must provide consumers adequate information to enable them to (1) deter-mine whether they wish to participate in the program and (2) select an alternate participant, provider agency, or individual to provide services.

Lack of information and misinformation about the effect of employment on benefits causes consumers to hesitate to attempt work. For the return to work proposals to be successful, consumers must have access to accurate information early in the planning process and also on an ongoing basis. Key potential sources of quality information include the Social Security Administration local benefits staff, staff of the provider agency, and consumer advocates. The panel questioned whether the staff of employment service agencies should be primarily or solely responsible for the implementation of an information-based planning process.

To maximize its effectiveness, the Return to Work program must insure that consumers have legitimate access to an informed information source. For many consumers with the level of disability related impairments required to be approved for SSA benefits, deciding whether it is beneficial to pursue employment will be a complex decision. The process of providing information to the consumer and discussing potential career options will involve a significant commitment of time. An employment service agency may devote considerable resources to a preliminary information-giving process leading to a decision by a consumer on whether to pursue return to work, with no assurance that this cost will ever be reimbursed. For consumers to approach return to work with confidence, they need timely access to accurate information, and the return to work proposals need to be grounded firmly in a process that assures that information will be available.

Prior to implementation, provider incentive programs should further identify the target population to assist local agencies in their marketing and program development activities.

A major strength of the return to work ticket proposal is its potential application to all SSA beneficiaries. At the same time, many current SSI/DI recipients may be viewed by providers as "too costly to serve" and therefore not be targeted by local provider marketing efforts. To allow maximum participation of all eligible beneficiaries, guidance should be provided to consumers and providers regarding the types of individuals for whom the program is intended. Specifically, analyses should be conducted which would provide additional data on the characteristics of individuals who return to work in order to minimize screening risks to providers.

Many local provider agencies may be reluctant to serve individuals who they believe will have significant support needs or may be "poor candidates" for long term employment retention. For example, potential reimbursement formulas that have been discussed in the Return to Work Ticket program (for example, 50% of an

individual's benefit payment for a five year time period) would only reimburse providers a small fraction of the amount they might receive for providing sheltered employment or supported employment services to the same individual during the same time period. For an SSI recipient receiving $500 per month or an SSDI recipient receiving $800 per month, this would amount to $3,000 and $4,800 respectively accruing to the agency for a five year period of time. In many areas of the country, local provider agencies could receive from $6,000-$8,000 for the delivery of sheltered employment services or from $4,000-$6,000 for the delivery of supported employment services, without the risk of no payment should the individual not remain employed for an extended period of time.

This analysis is not meant to detract from the overall significance of the return to work ticket approach or alternate participant program. Rather, it is merely intended to illustrate the importance of identifying the segments of the SSI/DI population who might benefit most from participation in the program, so that these individuals can be the recipients of focused marketing efforts. It is further intended to emphasize the importance of reducing or eliminating situations where beneficiaries are (a) interested in obtaining employment and (b) in their view ready to return to work through participation in the program, but are frustrated after being unable to identify local providers willing to accept the perceived "risks" involved their rehabilitation program.

The Return to Work Ticket and alternate participant programs as currently conceptualized may address the support needs of only a segment of the total SSA beneficiary population.

The Return to Work Ticket and alternate participant proposals have been criticized based on the view that the proposal will lead to widespread "creaming" - a trend among providers to only accept individuals with minimal support needs for participation in the program. The potential for "creaming" is not necessarily a flaw in the design of the proposal, since it implies that there are large numbers of individuals with minimal support needs who could "easily" return to work with minimal investment of provider resources. At one level, the system is designed to capitalize on the propensity of providers to serve individuals viewed as least costly to serve.

At the same, it must be recognized that some beneficiaries have more significant work disabilities than others and will likely require a much greater level of service and support over time to get and keep a job. Under the RTW proposal, the amount a provider actually recovers is in no way related to the level or costs of services provided to an individual to support their success. Therefore, provider agencies are likely to avoid serving individuals who have greater work disability, since far less of the service costs for these individuals may be recouped through the program. The alternate participant program may address this concern to some degree by reimbursing provider retroactively for pre-identified costs involved in providing services to the individual. The return to work proposals appear to be designed to work best for individuals whose support needs are limited to job placement services. Serving persons with a need for or interest in pre-employment training, education, or extensive ongoing support services may not be cost-effective for providers.

To the extent possible, provider incentive programs should furnish assistance and guidance to vendors in areas such as notification, screening, and evaluation.

An advantage of the return to work proposals is their potential ability to promote

competition among service providers and bring new vendors into the service delivery network. To achieve this important goal, SSA should consider what information can be compiled and shared with potential vendors to assist in the recruitment, screening, and evaluation processes. Effective notification systems need to be an integral part of the process to assist providers in identifying candidates who receive and are interested in using the voluntary RTW ticket to benefit from the services of an alternate participant. If competition is to be emphasized (several members of the expert panel forcefully argued that a collaborative system should be encouraged instead), then the system needs to insure a level "playing ground" so that providers do not incur additional risk resulting from factors over which they have no control.

For example, in communities in which there re a number of alternate providers, one agency through aggressive marketing could immediately recruit, accept and develop service plans for a large number of beneficiaries (e.g. 15 individuals) in the community. If that agency is then able to provide quality services which allow the 15 individuals to achieve SGA, then the agency should be rewarded for its efforts. If, however, the agency accepts the individuals' tickets and develops individualized employment plans, but then delays in the delivery of employment services, the agency will have unfairly prevented other agencies or alternate participants in the community from providing badly needed services. In these instances, beneficiaries' chances for achieving SGA are adversely impacted by the practices of the agency.

Effective screening is potentially the most critical of the areas in reducing risk. If a provider cannot reasonably identify people who are likely to return to work prior to an investment of resources, it is highly unlikely that the program will be cost effective for a provider to operate for an extended period of time. The Social Security Administration should consider making available certain data in order for providers to make some predeterminations about likelihood of success. Little "actuarial" information exists that would be likely to encourage providers to assume the risk involved. Access to available information may expand the prevailing narrow view of who might be expected to be cost effectively served under the proposal. In addition, the question of whether timing issues are likely to encourage use is an important concern. For example, the likelihood that someone who has just been through the multiple components of the disability determination process for the purposes of obtaining benefits will make use of a voluntary ticket or alternate participant program should be empirically investigated.

The panel emphasized repeatedly the primary role of accurate, employment-related assessments to enable the consumer and the service provider to have a base of information upon which to target jobs interests and to build on strengths. Quality assessments, particularly those that incorporate exposure to real work situations in the community, are invaluable in helping to efficiently and effectively plan for the needed services and supports. The fact that funding will not be realized until a significantly later point in time may provide little incentive for agencies to work effectively in the employment planning and development stage. Providers will likely feel pressured to make placements quickly, which could ultimately compromise consumer choice and empowerment and make long-term employment within a particular position or company an unrealistic goal. Under the Return to Work Ticket, the amount a provider actually recovers is in no way related to the level or costs of services provided to an individual to support their success, including time invested in initial planning and assessment. Given this reality, a provider agency is likely to avoid serving beneficiaries who have a greater work disability because of the perception that there is a very real possibility of not recovering costs.

The return to work proposals should contain clear provisions that will identify situations in which the consumer will be able to change jobs, re-enter employment after unsatisfactory employment experiences, and change provider agencies.

Another important factor related to consumer choice and empowerment involves provisions for additional opportunities if a consumer is not successful in initial efforts in returning to work. Provisions are needed for the consumer to begin over if job loss occurs and for the provider to recoup financial loss. The consumer should be able to begin anew with the same provider or with a different provider. Whenever possible, assessments and individual service plans should be carried over to the second chance, except where these entities are the subject of a consumer or a provider complaint. The provider should be able to recoup some fixed expenses, possibly through some milestone-like payments. SSA should resolve issues such as (1) whether the provider agency should be allowed to recoup some fixed expenses where consumers become uncooperative (this issue is addressed in the alternate participant proposal), or (2) whether the consumer will be allowed an unlimited number of opportunities to deposit the ticket with various providers.

Regulations governing the RTW program must clearly address whether provider agencies may also serve as the employer of the individual with a disability.

Several members of the expert panel described potential scenarios in which the community rehabilitation program would serve as both the provider agency and the employer. In most instances, this situation would apply to large rehabilitation facilities with federal contracts obtained through the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act. Serving as the employer is an obvious way for the provider agency to minimize risk by maximizing ongoing contact and control of the employment relationship. While the proposal does not specifically address the situation in which an individual "deposits" the ticket directly with an employer, it would be an obvious provider (or any employer) incentive to give priority to the recipient as a potential employee. In the view of several members of the expert panel, this is probably the most likely "low risk" strategy for providers who are also employers to encourage recruitment of SSA beneficiaries.

Provider incentive proposals should carefully consider "dual funding" arrangements as a mechanism for encouraging the participation of small and medium-sized agencies.

The goal of competition among service providers is to provide consumers with real alternatives as they select a service provider. The panel indicated that a very real implication of the return to work ticket is that smaller to medium sized providers will have difficulty participating, thus limiting competition. Smaller provider agencies generally have less working capital and less of an ability to take the significant financial risks inherent in the delayed payment design of the systems for such an extended period of time. Milestone payments based on specific benchmarks such as plan development, or completion of a trial work period, which would share some of the risk with SSAs A system of benchmark payments linked to serving persons with more significant work disabilities, or a payment differential, might help address the delayed payment, success only issue for providers.

The panel indicated that the return to work ticket would have a greater chance for success among small to medium size service providers if these agencies are able to use this reimbursement as a supplement to other funding revenues such as Vocational Rehabilitation, Job Training Partnership Act funds, or Projects With Industry funds. This would not only address some of the financial issues for agencies but would also improve the service options for beneficiaries served under the system. It is important that the provisions for the return to work program do not limit dual funding for the cost of employment services, particularly during the staff intensive assessment, planning, job development, job stabilization phases of the process.

The panel also raised a question regarding the benefit of establishing a competition-based approach that does not encourage collaboration among employment service providers and related support agencies. It is recognized that the concept of "work disability" reflects much more than a person's impairments. Other factors such as the person's abilities, the work duties of the potential job, and the broader community environment also contribute to the potential for employment success.

Coordinating services for beneficiaries that address all of these factors has been, and will continue to be, a challenge for service providers under the return to work proposal because provider agencies will receive little to no reimbursement in the early stages of employment when the coordination of services and supports is very critical. To be successful in this system, it may be necessary for agencies to function to a greater degree as brokers of services, helping beneficiaries to make better use of other services and natural employment supports existing in the community. Adjustments to the funding formula in the return to work program that would provide more early funding to support staff involvement in collaborative efforts that will potentially save future staff time would increase the chances for innovative and collaborative efforts.

Regulations governing the Return to Work program must address whether consumers may deposit an RTW Ticket with a public funding agency as a method of reducing financial risks to providers.

The return to work proposals emphasize transferring the full financial risk to providers with payment from SSA being dependent on the outcome of services. For small to mid-sized provider agencies to participate, strategies are needed that reduce the risk burden while maintaining performance accountability must be devised. One potential strategy within the Return to Work Ticket program would be to establish an option where the return to work ticket could be filed with a funding agency for whom employment of persons with a disability is a performance goal. For example, local developmental disabilities authorities have become increasingly active in the last decade in funding employment services and are a potential option for filing the ticket (Wehman, Revell, & Kregel, 1995). Centers for Independent Living also fund services leading to community integration through Title VII of the Rehabilitation Act and could serve in either a provider or funding coordinator role depending on the needs and interests of the consumer.

Entities such as developmental disabilities agencies, vocational rehabilitation agencies, and Independent Living Centers have direct funding and service coordination relationships with employment service providers. A consumer might need a variety of services from more than one provider to be successful in employment. The funding agency who receives the ticket would be in a position to access needed services, using where necessary its own funds. The funding agency receiving the ticket would clearly state its expectation of the provider(s) regarding elimination or reduction of Trust Fund support, and the funding agency would receive the payments from SSA as

called for in the ticket guidelines for those individuals who successfully generate a savings to the Trust Fund through employment. The funding agencies would be working within their missions; the funds from SSA would allow them the expand the impact of their programs. Consumer choice options would be expanded in the areas of access to multiple providers as compared to a limited number of larger agencies.

Evaluating the Efficacy of Provider Incentive Return to Work Programs

The NASI Return to Work Ticket Proposal and SSA Alternate Participant Vocational Rehabilitation program are innovative, ambitious efforts to promote the economic independence and employment of SSI/DI beneficiaries. As the programs are designed and implemented, it is essential to collect sufficient evaluation information to allow SSA to determine the success or failure of the program, determine areas of strength or weakness, and identify problems, issues or concerns which can be the focus of subsequent program modifications.

Insightful program evaluation efforts can help to insure that return to work programs do not adversely affect the economic status of individual beneficiaries. Accurate information can help SSA to determine whether (1) r return to work services are available to all beneficiaries seeking to access this service, (2) individuals are actually receiving services that they are promised when they agree to participate in the program, and (3) participation in the return to work ticket or alternate participant program has a positive or negative effect on the individual's overall economic condition.

From SSA's perspective, data collection efforts can provide a much information regarding the amount and types of services provided to beneficiaries and also, the types of agencies, individuals, businesses and organizations that are most likely to take part in the return to work program. Data can also provide information on the perceptions of provider agencies regarding (1) the strengths and weaknesses of the return to work program, and (2) recommendations for improving or modifying various aspects of the program in the future. This information will assist SSA in a number of ways. For example, it will allow SSA to determine whether the reimbursement fee structure established by a specific alternate participant is reasonable in comparison to other service providers serving similar individuals in the same area of the country. It can identify and evaluate potential modifications to the design of the return to work program that will allow it to improve its marketing, training and technical assistance efforts over time. Summative outcome data can assist SSA in justifying the costs of the program to a variety of constituencies. Perhaps most importantly, SSA can use the outcome and satisfaction information to insure that large numbers of individual beneficiaries are not adversely affected as a result of participation in the programs.

To fulfill these purposes, program evaluation information should be collected in the following major areas:

- Alternate Provider Demographic Information
- Consumer/Beneficiary Demographic and Functional Characteristics
- Service Plan Information
- Termination Information
- Employment Outcome Information
- Consumer Satisfaction Information

The remainder of this section will describe in detail the type of information that might be collected to assist SSA in the task of evaluating the efficacy of the provider incentive and return to work programs.

Alternate Provider Demographic Information

Information should be collected on the number of provider staff, the vocational and non-vocational services provided by the agency/ organization, the number of consumers served in various facets of the program, the relative percentage of consumers across specified diagnostic groups, and other related information. In addition, data should be obtained on the location the provider agency and the type of community (urban, suburban, rural, mixed) in which services are provided. This information will determine if providers in certain types of communities experience unique challenges in terms of recruiting consumers for participation in the program, finding a sufficient number of jobs that will allow many individuals to achieve SGA, or avoiding situations where individuals are terminated from program participation.

Program evaluation efforts should determine if certain areas of the country (e.g. rural areas, areas with high unemployment rates, areas with large numbers of non-English speaking individuals) lack provider agencies able to serve alternate participants or recipients of return to work tickets so that individuals wishing to return to work and achieve SGA are unable to access the services they view as essential to their employment.

The information described above, when viewed in relation to data from the areas of Employment Outcomes, Cost and Consumer Satisfaction, can address some of the key marketing questions affecting the return to work programs. For example, a "truism" of the program, expressed informally by many individuals, is that small, poorly capitalized agencies will have a difficult time successfully participating in the program. While this may or not by the case, without sufficient information about the characteristics of the provider agencies involved in the program, SSA will be unable to determine the type of agencies who can successfully provide services in the alternate participant or return to work ticket program versus those agencies who would benefit from modifications to the programs.

Consumer/Beneficiary Demographic and Functional Characteristics

Information is needed related to the consumer's primary disability classification, age of onset of disability, family situation (marital status, number of children, etc.), educational background and other factors. This information can be compared to SSA characteristics on the entire SSI/DI population to determine whether certain groups of individuals with disabilities are having difficulties accessing and benefiting from the return to work ticket or alternate participant program. In addition, background information related to the number and types of jobs previously held by the individual, the length of time the individual has been removed from the work force, type of rehabilitation services previously received (e.g. private employment agency, JTPA program, state employment assistance, etc.) can be reviewed to determine the personal and previous employment characteristics that correlate with an individual's ability to achieve SGA.

Finally in this area, information should be collected which specifies the sources and monthly amounts of public assistance received by the beneficiary, including SSI/SSDI, Medicaid/Medicare, temporary assistance (AFDC), Section 8 housing certificates, food stamps, and other cash or non-cash assistance. This information can be used to examine the economic impact of involvement in the provider incentive programs on beneficiaries, as well as compute the potential benefit-cost ramifications of the program on the federal and state governments.

Service Planning Information

Information should be obtained on the job or position the individual would like to pursue, preferred work locations, the specific type of

industry or business that best matches personal career goals, and related information. In addition, the individual can identify any educational or independent living goals being pursued concurrently. This information can be used to compare the individual's expectations for employment with the ultimate outcomes achieved through participation in the return to work program.

Program evaluation efforts should address those factors that the individual feels will most affect job satisfaction. Data should be collected on expectations related to wages, fringe benefits, working conditions, work hours (shift), location of business, supervisory style, full-time/part-time status, opportunities for advancement, general work conditions, and related information. This information will allow comparisons of the individual's employment situation with his or her actual experiences in the return to work program.

Finally, information should be obtained that will reflect the amount and type of services which the alternate participant provides to an individual consumer. This information can be used to determine (1) whether the amount and type of services provided affect the likelihood that and individual will achieve SGA, (2) whether certain types of consumers only receive certain "packages" of services, or (3) whether there are differences in the types of services provided to individuals who are terminated, as opposed to those who achieve SGA.

Terminations

In the proposed SSA Vocational Rehabilitation Payment Program, alternate participants will be required once a month to specify individuals previously accepted for services who are no longer being served. Specific information obtained will include the date of initial acceptance, date of termination, and reason relationship ended, including:

- Beneficiary dies or enters long-term institutional care;
- Deteriorating or unstable medical condition makes continuing the rehabilitation and employment effort impractical;
- Beneficiary moves out of alternate provider's service area;
- AP unable to place in suitable employment; and
- Program of rehabilitation and employment services terminated by mutual consent between AP and beneficiary-client.

A number of other reasons may shed additional light on the ending of a relationship between an alternate participant and a specific beneficiary. It might be very important to know what party initiated the termination. Was this the suggestion of the provider or the beneficiary? Was the employer involved in terminating an individual from employment? In addition, it will be extremely important to know when in the rehabilitation and employment process the termination occurred. For example, did the relationship end prior to the individual being placed into employment? How long had the individual been working when the relationship ended? If the individual was terminated after job placement, were attempts made to locate and place the individual into a subsequent job. There is a big difference, for example, between an individual being deemed "unable to place into suitable employment" who has experienced difficulties in multiple employment settings, as opposed to an individual who was deemed "unemployable" after the assessment phase of the rehabilitation process and before initial placement. It is important that SSA be able to identify trends in service delivery in instances where individuals may be viewed too challenging to serve prior to ever entering paid employment.

Employment Outcome Information

Information should be obtained on the type of job held by the individual. This information could

enable SSA to determine the extent to which provider agencies are placing people exclusively into entry level service occupations, the degree to which NISH contracts and other similar employment options are being used in the AP process, and the types of businesses which hire alternate provider participants.

It is also important for SSA to monitor each individual's hourly wage and work hours per week or monthly salary as appropriate, as well as fringe benefits. This information can address issues such as whether the individual is on track to achieve SGA within a reasonable amount of time, whether the provider agency has a tendency to place certain groups of individuals with disabilities only into entry level service occupations at minimum wage, and other related issues.

In addition, information should be obtained on the extent to which individuals participating in return to work programs use SSA work incentives, such as 1619a, 1691b, Plan for Achieving Self-Support, Impairment Related Work Expenses, Blind Work Expenses, etc. This data can allow SSA to assess the effect of the alternate participant program on other facets of the overall SSA program.

While the provider agency's primary focus will be on enabling individuals to achieve SGA, the agency must also be taking steps to insure that the individuals will not quickly jobs immediately after the SGA criteria have been met. Information should be collected on the supports being arranged by the provider agencies to insure long-term employment maintenance, including case management, transportation, job coaching, counseling, residential support, assistive technology, work place accommodations, and other types of ongoing supports.

Finally, information should be obtained on the analyses of the actual costs involved in providing the services necessary to allow beneficiaries to achieve SGA through participation in the return to work program. This information can be used to determine the various factors that affect the cost of providing services to individuals participating in the program.

Consumer Satisfaction Information

It is imperative that information be obtained on (1) the extent to which the individual feels that the wages earned on the job are sufficient to meet personal needs and expectations, (2) whether the individual anticipates a raise or pay increase in the near future, (3) whether the company's overall fringe benefit package meets the individual's expectations, and (4) specifically whether the company's medical benefits meet the individual's health care needs.

Data should also be obtained that focuses on the beneficiary's relationship with the supervisor and coworkers. Specific information will look how the individual gets along with his or her supervisor, whether the supervisor provides sufficient support, whether the individual feels included in the work force, and whether the individual believes that he or she is in any way being discriminated against in the employment setting.

In addition, information should be collected on the consumer's satisfaction with the job duties he or she performs and the working conditions experienced on the job site. This would include factors such as the shift (time of day) the individual works, part-time versus full-time status, how the job was obtained (who selected the job), and the extent to which the consumer feels that the job duties required are meaningful and challenging. This information can shed light on the extent to which consumers are involved in directing their own careers and the relationship of this direction to the likelihood that they will remain employed.

Finally, data should be collected on the extent to which the beneficiary is satisfied with the services and supports provided by the provider agencies. This will reveal important information regarding the degree to which the beneficiary was involved in selecting needed supports, the

availability of staff when problems arose, the types of problems addressed by the provider, and whether the beneficiary would recommend the provider agency to a friend or use the services again should the need arise.

DISCUSSION

The Return to Work Ticket and Alternate Participant programs are thoughtful and reasoned responses to a mounting social, economic and political problem - the unchecked growth of the SSI and SSDI beneficiary rolls. The provider incentive work group convened by VCU to consider the RTW ticket and other issues from the perspective of large and small provider agencies identified many strengths within the various proposals. It also discussed numerous ways in which the proposals could be applicable to the largest number of beneficiaries and involve the largest number of potential provider agencies. Several of the key issues discussed by the work group are described below.

First, the members of the work group emphasized that the provider incentive concepts will only achieve their intended effect when included as a key component of a comprehensive program of consumer-focused incentives and other proposed reforms. Provider incentives such as the RTW Ticket and Alternate Participant program will most certainly cause local providers to more intensely focus their efforts on serving SSA beneficiaries. However, without the concurrent implementation of several of the other reforms considered by the NASI panel and under discussion by the NIDRR/SSA Research and Policy Education Work Group, many of the challenges will remain for beneficiaries attempting to enter or reenter the work force. From the perspective of the provider work group convened by VCU, primary obstacles faced by individuals, particularly SSDI recipients, attempting to leave the beneficiary rolls and return to work include (1) the potential loss of health care coverage when the individual no longer qualifies for Medicare/ Medicaid coverage, (2) fear of a loss of income if the individual is unable to obtain a job which pays sufficient wages or in the individual is unable to maintain the job for an extended period of time, and (3) the complexity of existing work incentive provisions and the confusion, on the part of both consumers and providers, surrounding them.

The work group members generally endorsed many of the recommendations outlined by the NASI Disability Policy Panel, including the gradual replacement of benefit support through wages as proposed in the Disabled Worker Income Tax Credit (or a modified version as proposed by the Employment Support Institute) and improved access to medical coverage. The members were less enthusiastic about the necessity of additional financial incentives targeted at employers as a component of a comprehensive reform program. Prior experience with the Targeted Jobs Tax Credit led many of the members to emphasize that employers value competent employees and dependable support services far more than modest financial incentives. While recognizing the value of the Architectural and Transportation Barrier Removal Deduction and the Disabled Access Credit, the work group felt that efforts directed as employers should focus on innovative approaches that meet the needs of businesses and enlist them as partners in the return to work process. **A strong recommendation resulting from the work group's efforts is that research and demonstration efforts must be undertaken to effectively involve employers in the return to work process, either as "recipients" of RTW Tickets or through collaborative partnerships with local provider agencies.**

Second, it is very important that the unique needs of SSI recipients, including individuals with significant support needs, be con-

sidered and included in all aspects of provider incentive programs. Proponents of various types of provider incentives have recognized that initial proposals focus primarily on SSDI recipients. For example, the Return to Work Group acknowledged that some elements of various provider incentive proposals may lead to "creaming." At one level, an argument can be made that initial return to work efforts should focus on individuals who least need the support, thereby protecting the trust fund for "those that really need it." However, when viewed from a larger perspective, this argument is both unnecessary and shortsighted.

The notion that initial return to work efforts be directed primarily toward SSDI beneficiaries and ultimately expanded to meet the needs of SSI recipients, many of whom have no prior work histories, fails to recognize the heterogeneity of the SSA population and the potential trust fund savings that can be realized from the participation of SSI recipients in the program. The obstacles to employment faced by various groups of SSA beneficiaries are enormously diverse. A tremendous amount of evidence exists to indicate that many SSI recipients, particularly those presently being served in sheltered employment settings, are able to obtain and maintain employment through service programs that generate considerable taxpayer savings. At the same time, many SSDI recipients face a combination of functional impairments, discrimination, and economic concerns that make it extraordinarily difficult for them to obtain and succeed in employment. In short, many of the "easy" cases which would result in immediate savings to the trust fund may not be identified if provider incentive programs are not directly targeted to the SSI population from the very beginning of reform efforts.

Many SSI recipients are clearly able to obtain and maintain employment. However, these individuals have a difficult time earning significant wages. For example, recent SSA data indicates that fewer than 10% of all SSI recipients work. Of those individuals, 40% earn less than $100 per month and 80% earn less than $500 per month. To increase the involvement of these individuals, special consideration may need to be given to agencies providing services to SSI recipients. Under the current rules, SSDI beneficiaries lose cash benefits when gross monthly earnings exceed $500 (following completion of the trial work period). By comparison, SSI recipients who have no unearned income will not lose their cash benefit until monthly earnings reach $1,025.

Given the current rules, it may be unlikely that large numbers of SSI recipients may earn sufficient wages to be totally removed from the roles. However, an abundance of evidence exists to document substantial reductions in benefits as SSI recipients begin to enter the workforce. In short, if the intent of current reform efforts is solely to reduce the number of individuals on SSA beneficiary rolls, the primary emphasis on SSDI recipients may be justified. However, if a second purpose of the current efforts is to reduce trust fund expenditures, a failure to include SSI recipients in all stages of program planning fails to acknowledge a source of potentially dramatic trust fund savings.

Third, significant efforts must be directed toward providing consumers the information and support they desire to enable them to select providers and plan their careers. For there to be true consumer choice and empowerment, the panel indicated that the return to work proposals need to support the participation of a cross section of Trust Fund beneficiaries. To accomplish this goal, the return to work programs must support an in-depth information gathering and decision making process for consumers. It must support an assessment process that targets areas of probable success in employment and realistically covers the costs to provider agencies in providing the pre- and post-employment services necessary for long term job satisfaction and success. It must be financially accessible to an array of provider agencies that utilize different job supports designs.

Finally, it must recognize that second and third chances are frequently needed by consumers to achieve success in employment.

Fourth, the return to work programs should be designed to allow the maximum array of agencies, organizations, entities or individuals to participate as providers of employment services. The panel felt strongly that the likelihood of participation and success might be different among different types of providers. Interaction among public and private providers must be carefully considered. For example, in the Return to Work Ticket proposal, could an individual deposit his or her ticket with a state vocational rehabilitation agency or local family service agency? Many of these entities already contract with private providers for services. If the beneficiary filed the ticket with a provider, there might be an impact on the ability or priority in receiving public services. The public entity might also have an expectation of the provider regarding elimination or reduction of other public support. In this scenario, it is to a provider's benefit to have the beneficiary file the ticket with a public agency since it might then provide the service without the administrative requirements and risk of the proposed Social Security payment system.

Some panel members felt that public agencies may be most likely to have an incentive to participate as they can leverage other dollars and use Trust Fund financing as an offset or windfall without risk to core funding. Other members felt that this approach would encourage recruitment of SS beneficiaries, but, as with the current VR system, not constitute major portions of those served. The system should, by legislation or policy, address the relationship between this and other programs which could be "bundled" to make the proposal viable to a larger group of beneficiaries as well as providers. At a minimum, the return to work program must provide clear guidance regarding the types of agencies eligible to participate in the program.

CONCLUSION

The return to work proposal presently under development are important efforts to address a crucial problem. Helping large numbers of beneficiaries to return to employment and achieve SGA will require a combined commitment on the part of provider agencies, individuals, and SSA to overcome potential obstacles and develop creative solutions to challenging implementation problems. While the proposal rightly attempts to increase both the risks and rewards for local provider agencies participating in the process, it is important to design a system in which consumer choice and self-determination will be retained, the return to work services will be available to all individuals who desire these services, agencies will be reimbursed for the actual costs of providing services, and the overall efficacy of the program will be comprehensively evaluated to maximize the success of the program.

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Abstract

This article describes different methods used by state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies to fund time limited supported employment services. Findings are reported from a survey of 385 vendored supported employment provider agencies regarding types of reimbursement method used, the influence of different types of methods on key consumer outcomes, and recommendations for improving funding systems. The findings consistently pointed to significantly more positive response of vendors to funding methods that incorporate negotiated rates at the individual provider level as compared to statewide fixed rates for all vendors. Statewide fixed hourly rates were found to discourage both conversion to community integrated employment opportunities and the reopening of supported employment cases after job loss. The same response pattern held true for respondents' perceptions of reimbursements covering the costs of services. Statewide rates for specified outcomes or for daily, weekly or monthly service units were found to cover the cost of services at levels significantly lower than the other funding methods.

FUNDING SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT: ARE THERE BETTER WAYS?

By: Grant Revell, Michael West, & Yulin Cheng

Few Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs have grown as rapidly as supported employment, from fewer than 10,000 participants at the program's inception in 1986 to over 135,000 in 1995 (Wehman, Revell, & Kregel, 1997). To a substantial degree, this growth has been spurred by state systems change grants funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) under Title III of the Rehabilitation Act. The purpose of these grants was to modify existing service delivery systems for persons with severe disabilities to promote supported employment as an alternative to sheltered employment, work activity, and other segregated day programs (Wehman, 1989). States typically used these grants to build system capacities by increasing the number and competencies of vendored service providers, providing regional consultation services, and developing data management and program evaluation systems (West, Revell, & Wehman, 1992).

Supported employment is a VR service option designed for individuals who historically have not been given the opportunity to work competitively, or who have only worked intermittently in competitive settings, due to the severity of their disabilities (Federal Register, August 14, 1987). Supported employment combines time-limited training and adjustment services funded through the VR system, followed by extended support services funded through another source (Wehman & Kregel, 1985). This collaborative support differentiates this option from other types of VR programs.

Identification of the most effective funding strategies for supported employment has long been an important issue for program administrators and advocates. Previous research on supported employment funding has focused on two areas: **funding amounts and sources** (McGaughey, Kiernan, McNally, Gilmore, & Kieth, 1994; Revell, Wehman, Kregel, West, & Rayfield, 1994; Sale, Revell, West, & Kregel, 1992; Wehman & Revell, in press), and **cost-benefit analyses** of supported employment in relation to alternative programs (Baer, Simmons, Flexer, & Smith, 1995; Hill et al., 1987; Lewis, Johnson, Bruininks, & Kallsen, 1993; McCaughrin, Ellis, Rusch, & Heal, 1993).

With regard to the first area of research, funding for the program has increased dramatically since the program's inception in 1986. For example, in 1986 federal and state VR agencies devoted approximately $1.3 million to supported employment agencies and consumers. In 1995, the total was over $133 million (Wehman et al., 1997). Perhaps most indicative of the program's impact on the vocational service system, funding from extended services agencies has grown from $18 million in 1986 to over $366 million in 1995 (Wehman et al., 1997). Thus, each VR dollar leveraged an additional $2.75 from extended service funding agencies to provide ongoing support.

Benefit-cost studies, the second predominant area of funding research, have tended to find that these expenditures are cost-beneficial to consumers and taxpayers in comparison to alternative programs (Baer et al., 1995; Lewis et al., 1993; McCaughrin et al., 1993; Thompson, Powers, & Houchard, 1992). The results of these analyses have generally shown that supported employment programs that focus on individual, as opposed to group, placement models improve consumer employment outcomes, cost less than other adult day programs, and generate savings for taxpayers.

Steps Involved in Developing Funding Mechanisms for Supported Employment

Funding agencies use a variety of approaches to purchase services. In the "time-limited" phase of supported employment, job development, placement, the arrangement of natural supports, and initial skill acquisition are generally funded through the VR system. After the individual has adjusted to the job setting, "extended services" are arranged and delivered through funds provided by another source, such as state mental health, mental retardation, and developmental disability agencies (Wehman & Kregel, 1985).

All approaches to funding time-limited services have three common elements. These components include: (1) defining the specific services, (2) defining the unit of service, and (3) establishing a cost for the defined service unit.

Defining services. Supported employment programs frequently provide community-based assessments; job development and placement services; job site training and support services necessary to assist the consumer to become stable in employment; related skill training and support that is integral to the individual's employment success (e.g., transportation, money management, etc.); the identification and arrangement of natural supports both on and away from the work setting; and extended supports services for long-term job maintenance.

Defining service units. Once the services are identified, funding agencies can then define service units which subsequently form the basis for reimbursement. Service units are generally based on time, such as an hourly or daily unit of service, or based on a desired service outcome. For example, when conducting community based assessments for supported employment candidates, a local vendor of supported employment services can be reimbursed for the time involved in completing the assessment (time-based) or paid a flat fee based on the completed assessment (outcome-based).

Establishing a service unit cost. Once the unit of service is established, the final step is assigning a cost to the service unit. In funding approaches based on the amount of time the service is provided, costs are usually assigned on a fixed or negotiated basis. In a fixed rate system, the funding agency establishes a non-negotiable statewide fee level for all vendors of a specified service. In a negotiated rate system, the funding agency negotiates the fee rate for specified services with each vendor. Negotiated rates may be based on a specific cost formula established by the funding agency, or alternatively, through formal or informal discussions at a local/regional level between the prospective vendor and the funding agency.

In purchase of service systems using an outcome-based unit, the funding agency sets a fee for a series of services. For example, typical services and fees within the employment arena might include a community based assessment ($1,000), job development and placement ($1,500), and successful employment for a minimum of 90 days ($2,500). The vendor receives payment only if the service recipient successfully achieves a positive outcome from the service. These fee levels can be based on historical cost patterns or projected vendor budgets and can be heavily influenced by cost control efforts of the funding agency.

CATEGORIES OF FUNDING MECHANISMS

The previous section described the general process used by funding agencies to establish rates for services. This section will document how these principles have been applied in the funding of supported employment services. Funding methods currently used by state agencies to fund time-limited services fall into three broad categories: fee for service agreements; contract or slot-based funding; and performance or outcome-based approaches. Each of these will be briefly summarized below.

Fee for service agreements. In a fee for service agreement, the vendor receives payment of an agreed upon fee amount for the specific intervention time during which an employment specialist is engaged in providing services to a specified individual with a disability. This method breaks down the unit of service into small increments, typically an hour, and tracks the length/ intensity of service provided to each participant.

Three fee for service alternatives are used by VR agencies. In the first, a statewide fixed hourly rate, the funding agency assigns a rate for a service to all vendors. The recent mean average fixed hourly rate, calculated from rates reported by 17 VR agencies nationwide, was $24.12 (Wehman et al., 1997). The second alternative, a negotiated hourly rate based on overall program costs, establishes a vendor specific rate with probable variations in the assigned rate from vendor to vendor based on differences in program costs and/or community level cost standards. The recent mean average negotiated hourly rate, calculated from rates reported by 25 VR agencies nationwide, was $31.47 (Wehman et al., 1997). The third alternative, negotiated hourly rates based on need and complexity of services, usually involves an effort by the funding agency to encourage vendors to respond to the needs of underserved persons by negotiating a higher hourly fee rate for the provision of comparatively more complex services. The same core service might carry different rates for persons with a severe and persistent mental illness or for persons who are considered severely mentally retarded.

Contract or slot based funding. Contract or slot-based agreements define a unit of service on a daily, weekly, monthly, or annual basis and make payments to the vendor based on participation by the individual with a disability in the service for that defined unit. In contrast to the hourly fee for service agreements, units of service in contract/slot based funding are not designed to specifically track intensity of services provided at an individual participant level. The contract/slot based approach funds services through agreements for services to a specified number of individuals in contrast to the individual participant service authorizations used with the hourly fee method.

Three types of contract/slot-based methods are used by VR agencies. The first, statewide fixed rate established for a daily, weekly or monthly unit of service, involves the funding agency establishing set rates used by all vendors of the same service. The second is negotiated rates where rates established with different vendors for the same service vary based on vendor costs and/or community level rate standards. The third is yearly contracts for a specified number of units of service or slots where the funding agency sets a contracted annual target service level with the vendor. For example, the funding agency might contract for ten supported employment slots with a vendor, and it is the vendor's responsibility to keep those slots filled with appropriate service recipients during the contract year. A second example involves the funding agency contracting for a specific number of successful supported employment placements. The vendor agency is then responsible for organizing its resources during the contract year for achieving these placements. Monthly payments are usually made to the vendor at 1/12th the annual contract

amount, and this payment is not based on the specific levels of service or outcomes achieved for any one month.

Performance or outcome-based approaches. In performance or outcome-based approaches, key service milestones are set with a payment level identified for each achieved milestone. Payments are made to the service vendor when the participant achieves each milestone. When a statewide fixed outcome rate is used, the funding agency defines the service outcomes and sets a specific fee for each outcome. In a negotiated outcome based approach, the funding agency might consider cost information from a vendor before finalizing a rate agreement. For example, a funding agency might establish a series of payment steps starting with assessment and goal setting and continuing through job placement, job retention for specified time periods, and finally successful movement to extended supported employment services for purposes of long term job maintenance. The funding agency would negotiate an overall reimbursement amount per individual who successfully completes the full series of out-comes. A series of payments would then be made to the vendor as the individual with a disability completes each of the defined outcome steps. These payments might be a set percentage of the overall amount, such as 15% for a successful assessment outcome or 20% for a successful job placement.

The type of funding mechanism used by state agencies to reimburse local provider organizations for the delivery of supported employment services has more than just esoteric administrative implications. Wehman and Kregel (1995) have described a number of ways in which funding mechanisms can have a dramatic effect on the quality of supported employment services. For example, funding mechanisms may create inequities in reimbursement rates between supported employment and facility-based vocational programs such as activity centers and sheltered workshops, making it less likely that agencies will convert segregated employment programs into integrated, community-based employment alternatives. Funding approaches that limit pre-placement activities such as person-centered planning and job development may unintentionally restrict consumer choice and self-determination. Similarly, funding mechanisms that fail to take into consideration the varying levels of support needed by individuals with disabilities may tend to exclude individuals with the most significant disabilities from participation in the program. Finally, funding approaches that fail to take into consideration the post-placement support needs of individuals may unnecessarily limit job mobility and career advancement.

The purpose of this article is to investigate current approaches used by state agencies to fund time-limited supported employment services from the perspective of local supported employment provider agencies. Specifically, the results of in-depth telephone interviews with 386 local provider agencies in 40 states will be reported in terms of: (1) the types of funding arrangement most frequently used; (2) the relationship of various funding approaches to issues such as conversion, inclusion of individuals with the most significant disabilities, consumer choice and self-determination, and career advancement, and (3) implications of findings for future efforts to improve supported employment time limited funding arrangements.

METHOD

Participants

The survey participants were representatives of 385 randomly selected supported employment provider agencies located in 40 states. The mean supported employment caseload of responding agencies was 47.6 consumers. The mean supported employment staff size was 9.0, from a mean total agency staff size of 81.2. Additional characteristics of these

agencies, their services, and consumers are presented in Table 1 below. Respondents were typically coordinators of the supported employment program or executive directors of the agency.

Table 1

Characteristics of the Agencies Surveyed

1. Type of service catchment area:	
Urban	17.9%
Suburban	3.4%
Rural	38.8%
Mixed	39.8%
2. Disability groups served:	
Single disability group	32.5%
Multiple disability groups	67.5%
3. Specific disability groups served (agencies serving single groups only):	
Mental retardation	69.9%
Mental illness	23.6%
Other disabilities	6.5%
4. Supported employment service models utilized:	
Individual placement only	50.4%
Group placement only	1.3%
Individual and group placement	48.3%

Instrumentation

The data for this investigation were collected through the National Supported Employment Provider Survey conducted by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU-RRTC). The National Provider Survey was developed by the VCU-RRTC to elicit information via telephone on a number of issues pertaining to supported employment service delivery, such as unserved and underserved populations, use of natural supports, time-limited and extended services methods and funding, and use of Social Security Work Incentives.

The National Provider Survey was developed through multiple levels of item submission and review both internally and externally. The section of the survey dealing with time limited funding provided eight options for specifying the type of primary funding method and an other option for unique funding methods. A pilot version of the National Provider Survey was administered by telephone to representatives of 10 supported employment agencies in Virginia, who then assessed face validity and response difficulty for the items.

Procedure

Sample selection. The survey sample was drawn from the population of providers of supported employment services as defined and funded under Title VI(C) of the Rehabilitation Act. State VR agency staff responsible for their respective state supported employment programs were contacted and requested to provide a current list of public and private agencies vendored for supported employment services in accordance with applicable state and federal VR regulations and policies. These lists were reviewed to insure that they were of recent origin and appeared to contain only names of providers of supported employment. Follow-up contacts for clarification were made for state lists that failed to meet these criteria. A total of 40 usable vendor lists were obtained for sampling. The survey sample was completed through random selection with substitution. An average of 20% of confirmed providers were sampled, with sample sizes within a state ranging from a minimum sample of 10% to a maximum sample of 25%.

Telephone surveys. Because of the extensive nature of the survey, telephone surveys were conducted over the course of approximately eight months by eight telephone interviewers. A survey script was developed that provided a consistent method for interviewers to identify appropriate respondents to the various minisurveys and lead respondents through the multiple sections. Most surveys required several telephone contacts to schedule and complete, with total survey time averaging approximately 45 minutes.

Data analysis. Quantitative data were aggregated using database and statistical software. Data analysis included computation of descriptive statistics (means and frequencies) and chi-square analyses. Responses to open-ended items were analyzed and interpreted qualitatively through inductive content analysis and analyst-constructed typologies (Patton, 1990).

RESULTS

Of the 385 agencies participating in this study, 315 (81.8%) were vendored to provide time-limited supported employment services, and provided data for subsequent survey items. Although state VR agencies are the primary funding source for services, some vendors receive funding for time limited services from other state and local agencies.

Use of Funding Methods by Vendors of Time Limited Services

Representatives of the 315 agencies vendored to provided time limited services were asked to identify the primary funding category through which each received funding. A summary of their responses is presented in Table 2. Among the three general funding categories for time limited service, fee for service agreements using hourly rates were most frequently reported (47.7%), followed by contract/slot based agreements using a daily or more extended time frame (27.2%), and outcome/performance based agreements (14.3%). Other funding agreements were used by 10.8% of the sample. These other funding alternatives usually involved short term start-up grants used to help establish a vendorship, not sustain it.

Each of these three general categories of funding agreements encompassed a variety of specific funding methods. A key factor in the variation among funding methods is whether

Table 2

Primary Categories of Purchase of Service Agreements Used by Respondents Time Limited Services *(N = 315)*

Funding Category	Percent of Agencies
Category I. Fee for Service Agreements	47.7%
Category II. Contract/Slot Based Agreement	27.2%
Category III. Outcome/Performance Based Funding Agreements	14.3%
Category IV. Other Funding Method	10.8%

payment rates were fixed or negotiated. Presented with nine specific funding alternatives, survey respondents were asked to identify the primary funding method used in securing payment for the provision of time limited supported employment services. Response rate on use of each follows.

Fee for service agreements. Table 3 on the following page presents the percent of the 150 respondents who picked one of the three fee for service alternatives as their primary funding method. Use of statewide fixed hourly rates (46.0%) was most frequently reported, followed by negotiated hourly rates based on overall program costs (36.7%). Negotiated hourly rates based on the expected complexity of employment services needed by identified groups or individuals was the least frequently used (17.3%) fee for service funding method.

Contract/slot-based funding. Table 4 on the following page shows the percent of 86 respondents who picked one of the three contract/slot based alternatives as their primary funding method. From this group, use of yearly contracts for a specified # of units (61.6%) was the most

frequently reported contract/slot based funding method and was the third most frequently reported among the overall nine funding methods. Negotiated (23.3%) and statewide fixed (15.1%) rates were reported used with much less frequency.

Table 3

Use of Fee for Service Agreements as the Primary Funding Method for Time Limited Services (N = 150)

Fee for Service Funding Alternatives	Percent of Agencies
1. Statewide fixed hourly rate for all agencies in state.	46.0%
2. Negotiated hourly rate based on overall program cost.	36.7%
3. Negotiated hourly rate allowing different fees across disability groups or individuals based on complexity of employment service needed.	17.3%

Table 4

Use of Contract/Slot Based Agreements as the Primary Funding Method for Time Limited Services (N = 86)

Contract/Slot Based Funding Alternatives	Percent of Agencies
4. Statewide daily, weekly, or monthly rate.	15.1%
5. Negotiated daily, weekly, or monthly rate.	23.3%
6. Yearly contract for specified # of units.	61.6%

Outcome/performance-based funding agreements. Forty-five respondents (14.4%) reported outcome/performance based funding as their primary funding method. Of these, a negotiated outcome based funding method was reported by 32 (71.1%) of the respondents, while only 13 (28.9%) reported use of a state fixed rate outcome based method.

Impact of Funding Method on Services

To study the potential impacts of different funding methods on the delivery, quality and outcomes of supported employment services, respondents were asked a series of questions on key service delivery and program management areas. Responses from vendors indicating primary use of the other funding method category are not reported here. These methods were frequently used for start-up funding, and the temporary nature of this funding approach made it inconsistent with the funding methods included for analysis.

Eight follow-up questions were used to assess the potential impact of funding method on time limited services in two key areas. The first set of questions sought information on the extent to which type of funding method discouraged vendors from utilizing the following proactive service strategies: (1) serving persons with the most severe disabilities; (2) basing services on consumers' needs; (3) basing services on consumer choice; and (4) reopening cases when someone loses a job. The second set of questions addressed the impact of type of funding on key program management areas: (1) movement of individuals from segregated services to community based employment; (2) establishment of quotas by the funding agency for the number of persons placed or closed; (3) pressure by the funding agency for the vendor to close cases quickly to control costs; and (4) the extent to which reimbursements cover the vendors' costs.

Table 5 on the following page presents the overall rate of YES responses across all funding methods to each of these eight questions. On the key question regarding cost of providing services, 51.1% of the respondents indicated that current reimbursement method adequately covered costs of services. The YES responses for the other seven questions ranged from 22.6% on funding method

discouraging basing services on consumer choice to 39.6% for discouraging movement of individuals from segregated services to community based employment. These response rates indicate a general belief by these vendors that type of funding method can place negative impositions on the delivery and management of time-limited services. Chi-square tests found statistically significant differentiation among the funding methods for four of the eight questions. Responses by specific funding method for these four questions are summarized in Table 6 on the following page.

Table 5

Impact of Funding Method on the Delivery and Management of Time Limited Services

Impact of Primary Funding Method	Overall YES Response
Discourages serving persons with the most severe disabilities	32.9%
Discourages basing services on consumers' needs.	32.8%
Discourages basing services on consumer choice.	22.6%
Discourages reopening cases when someone loses a job.	31.1%
Discourages movement of individuals from segregated services to community-based employment.	39.6%
Sets quota for the number of persons placed or closed.	34.7%
Pressures program to close cases quickly to control costs.	27.5%
Reimbursements adequately cover costs of services.	51.1%

Discouraging movement from segregated services to community-based employment. Success in converting resources from segregated services to community integrated opportunities is a critical measure of the proactive responsiveness of supported employment services. Of the 315 respondents that provided time limited services, the 225 that operated programs offering segregated services responded to this question. Providers funded by a statewide fixed hourly rate indicated that this funding method discouraged movement from segregated services to community based employment at a significantly higher rate (57.1%) than other funding methods. In comparison, the negotiated rate per specified outcome method discouraged resource reallocation at a significantly lower rate (14.3%) than other funding methods and was therefore supportive of conversion.

Discouraging reopening cases following job loss. Supported employment is targeted to individuals with the most significant disabilities who have not been employed or have been employed only intermittently in the competitive labor force. Supported employees as a group have limited job experience, and job loss will occur for some of them. Vendors of supported employment services need to be in a position to respond to job loss by reinitiating services. Providers funded by a statewide fixed hourly rate indicated that this funding method discouraged reopening cases of supported employees after job loss at a significantly higher rate (42.0%) than other funding methods. In comparison, the negotiated rate per specified outcome method discouraged reopening cases at a significantly lower rate (12.9%) and was perceived as most responsive of all funding methods for re-opening cases following job loss.

Establishing quotas. The establishment of placement quotas by funding agencies is frequently a responsible effort to match expected outcomes to planned expenditures. However, quotas can also limit the flexibility of vendor staff to provide the intensity of services required by each individual and can therefore potentially reduce the quality of services. Providers funded by yearly contracts for specified units linked this funding method to the establishment of quotas at a significantly higher rate (54.7%) than other funding methods.

Table 6

Impact of Funding Method on Program Management in the Delivery of Time Limited Services

Type of Funding Method	Discourages movement from segregrated services to community-based employment	Discourages reopening cases when someone loses a job	Sets quotas for the number of individuals expected to be placed or closed by program	Reimbursement is adequately cover costs of services
Statewide fixed hourly rate	57.1%	42.0%	25.0%	50.0%
Negotiated hourly rate based on overall program cost	36.8%	37.0%	30.9%	48.2%
Negotiated hourly rate based on complexity of services	26.2%	19.2%	30.7%	65.4%
Statewide daily, weekly, or monthly rate	58.3%	38.5%	8.3%	15.4%
Negotiated daily, weekly, or monthly rate	33.3%	21.1%	20.0%	60.0%
Yearly contract for specified # of units	43.3%	22.7%	54.7%	39.6%
Statewide rate per specified outcome	57.1%	30.8%	41.7%	25.0%
Negotiated rate per specified outcome	14.3%	12.9%	50.0%	68.7%
F Score for responses	19.00*	15.62*	21.89**	22.87**

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$

Extent to which reimbursements adequately cover costs. Funding methods that do not adequately cover costs restrict the quality and intensity of services. Over two-thirds (68.7%) of the vendors funded through negotiated rates per specified outcome indicated that this method provided reimbursements that adequately covered costs. This response rate was significantly higher than the response levels for other funding methods. In comparison, only 15.4% of the vendors funded

by statewide fixed daily, weekly or monthly rates and 25.0% of those funded by statewide rates per specified outcomes indicated that these methods adequately covered costs.

Recommendations for changes in time-limited funding methods. Each respondent was also asked to identify up to three changes or recommendations they would make to their state VR agency regarding funding that would improve service delivery. Responses were not differentiated among the specific funding methods. The most frequently indicated areas were: open up more funding for time limited services (18.7%); more agency control over use of funds (16.8%); increase fee-for-service rate (14.6%); change reimbursement method (11.4%); and speed up reimbursement process (10.5%). These responses reflect the perceived need for additional funding options for time limited services, a need for higher reimbursement levels for services provided, and a desire for the funding agency to be more flexible and responsive in funding of time limited services.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the potential impact of type of funding method on the delivery and management of time limited supported employment services. This topic has important implications for public policy and funding related to employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. With regards to public policy, the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1986 and 1992 position supported employment services specifically to assist persons with the most severe disabilities who have been underserved or unsuccessfully served in community integrated competitive employment through traditional VR services. This legislation complements the Americans with Disabilities Act (PL 101-336) in articulating a national disability policy to support community integration by stating that all persons with disabilities are presumed to be able to work with the availability of individualized services and supports. Administrative agencies have a responsibility to assure the quality and responsiveness of supported employment services to persons with the most significant disabilities.

In terms of public funding, state VR agencies are using increasing amounts of Title VI(C) and general case service funds for supported employment consumers and services (Sale, West, Revell, & Kregel, 1992; Wehman et al., 1997). The RSA has reported that state VR agencies closed 13,950 individuals successfully in supported employment in Fiscal Year 1994, representing 7.4% of all successful VR closures for that year, at a mean average expenditure of $4,763 in VR funds per person (U.S. Dept. of Education, 1996). The provision of supported employment services now involves a substantial and growing expenditure of public funds for a steadily expanding population.

The range of responses on the primary funding method study question is clear evidence that funding agencies use a variety of payment arrangements to reimburse vendors of time limited services. The findings of this survey confirm that use of an hourly fee for service rate is the predominant method of funding time-limited supported employment services, reported by almost half (47.7%) of all respondents. Within this group, better than half (54%) were able to negotiate rates based on provider, community, or consumer characteristics. The majority (71.1%) of those providers funded under outcome or performance-based funding were also able to negotiate rates. However, less than one-fourth (23.3%) of agencies using contract or slot-based funding were able to negotiate rates, suggesting that these types of systems tend to use a top-down approach which does not allow vendors to influence rates to any substantial degree.

A significant and disconcerting finding from this survey is that almost half of all

respondents believed that reimbursements for time-limited services did not cover their costs. Vendors are unlikely to voluntarily expand a service which they believe is underfunded and requires them to operate at a loss, regardless of benefits to consumers. Thus, supported employment staffing and consumers remain small in comparison to segregated, facility-based services where costs can be more readily controlled. This supposition is borne out by surveys of vendors and state agencies which indicate that the majority of consumers receiving extended employment services are served in sheltered employment and day activity programs, with only 15-20% served in supported employment (McGaughey, Kiernan, McNally, & Gilmore, 1993; McGaughey, Kiernan, McNally, Gilmore, & Keith, 1995). When service access is limited in this manner, the right of consumers to choose supported employment as their service option is abrogated and efforts at systems change are impeded (Mank, 1994; West, 1995).

Is there evidence that the type of funding method utilized to secure time limited supported employment services can make a significant difference in the quality and responsiveness of services? The findings consistently point to the significantly more positive response of vendors to funding methods that incorporate negotiable rate levels at the individual provider level as compared to establishing statewide fixed rates for all vendors. The statewide fixed hourly rate is the funding method used most by agencies purchasing time limited supported employment services. Statewide fixed hourly rates were found to discourage both conversion to community integrated employment opportunities and reopening of supported employment cases after job loss at a level significantly higher than other funding methods analyzed. In comparison, negotiated rates for specified outcomes discouraged conversion and reopening cases at a level significantly lower than other funding methods. Within each of the three funding categories, the statewide fixed rate options were viewed more negative in terms of conversion and reopening cases as compared to the negotiated rate option.

The same response pattern held true for the question on reimbursements covering the costs of services. Statewide rates for specified outcomes or for daily, weekly or monthly service units were both found to cover the cost of services at levels significantly lower than the other funding methods. Reimbursements through negotiated rates for specified outcome were seen by vendors to adequately cover costs at a level significantly higher than the other methods. As a group, the negotiated rates options were viewed more positively by vendors across the funding categories in terms of covering costs than the statewide fixed rate options.

There are a number of apparent reasons why negotiated rate options appear to be viewed by vendors as more responsive than statewide fixed rate options. The first is reimbursement level. As reported earlier in these study, the mean national negotiated hourly rate in FY 1995 was $31.47 as compared to $24.12 for statewide fixed hourly rates. A flexible rate structure based on an accurate consideration of service costs allows for the unique nature of a provider and its participant pool to be taken into account. Negotiated rates give consideration to differences across providers and communities, such as the scope of services provided under the hourly rate, staff expertise, past success rates, problems encountered in serving consumers in rural areas, or other factors. Negotiated rates also allow for consideration of differences in costs in serving different groups of individuals. A provider might be drawing its population from a group of individuals currently in a segregated activity center who have limited or no competitive work exposure, or from those with very severe physical or cognitive disabilities. The support needs to assist these individuals move to community-based employment are relatively intense.

The second reason negotiated rates may be viewed favorably is flexibility and responsiveness

toward vendors. Negotiated rate funding methods create an incentive for providers to serve persons with more challenging employment service needs and respond to individual needs, including replacement after job loss. Again, the rate negotiation process gives credence to the service, population, and cost history and projections for each provider. The vendor is not forced to move its program towards the outcomes achievable through a one-size-fits-all rate that is not truly reflective of the real costs of any specific agency. Instead, negotiated rates can positively address issues challenging the quality and growth of supported employment.

The third reason is consumer responsiveness. Confidence that service costs will be reimbursed at an adequate level allows the provider to support self-advocacy efforts by the individual with a disability in exploring a range of job interests and taking a larger role in job and career decisions.

The potential impact of findings on state and national policies is clear and unambiguous. For supported employment and other competitive employment options to supplant segregation as the option of choice for persons with severe disabilities, agencies which provide these services must be reimbursed at levels which adequately account for service costs, including provider- and consumer-level variables and risks. When providers are able to negotiate with funding agencies, those variables can be more readily taken into account.

Another crucial policy issue is access to services for those with the most severe disabilities with presumably more complex support needs. Although this group is the target population of the supported employment program, they are often underrepresented (Revell et al., 1994; Wehman & Kregel, 1995). The findings of this investigation indicate that vendors who are able to negotiate rates have more financial incentive to include members of this group in their service populations. Thus, flexible reimbursement schedules based on consumer characteristics can be a positive strategy for achieving this critical mission of the program.

CONCLUSION

This study is an initial effort to analyze the impact of funding methods on the delivery and management of supported employment services. It presents information limited to views of providers of time limited supported employment services and does not present comparable information from funding agencies, VR counselors, or recipients of these services. More in depth definition of specific funding methods and their application is needed as well as analysis of cost and outcome information related to each.

Although the primary focus of the study was to survey agencies funded for time-limited services through state VR agencies, the findings have relevance for those funded through other means. For example, increasing numbers of agencies are receiving public and private funds for supported employment through Medicaid Home and Community-Based Waivers, worker's compensation and disability insurance, educational authorities, or other means. A logical assumption is that the same relationships between funding method and service quality would apply in those situations as well.

This study points towards clear patterns indicating that negotiated rate funding methods are more responsive to vendor efforts to convert resources, offer needed services to targeted populations, and recover service costs. Negotiated rates are therefore a prime strategy in two key policy arenas: First, for promoting conversion of staff and other resources from segregated vocational programs to community-based employment; and second, for insuring consistent and successful implementation of the Rehabilitation Act with regards to consumer choice and self-determination, and competitive employment as a viable option for all.

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine current practices and perceptions of supported employment provider agencies regarding extended services. From a total survey sample of 385 agencies, 345 (89.6%) were vendored to provide extended services. The average extended service caseload was 27 consumers or 57% of the average supported employment caseload. More than half of agencies used the employment specialist who initially performed training to monitor extended services. Only four of ten extended services consumers received more than the minimally required support level of two contacts per month. Although state mental retardation/developmental disability and mental health agencies were the primary sources of extended services funding, providers used a variety of funding sources and methods for extended services. Respondents who were able to negotiate reimbursement rates were more likely to indicate that their funding method promoted consumer choice and movement of consumers and resources from segregated services to community-based employment. Findings are discussed in relation to the growing use of natural supports in extended services, and the relationship of funding mechanisms to service quality and access.

EXTENDED EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT: ANALYSIS OF IMPLEMENTATION AND FUNDING ISSUES

By: Michael West, Angela Johnson, Alicia Cone, Ana Hernandez, & Grant Revell

Individuals with severe cognitive and physical disabilities historically have had low expectations for competitive employment because of their needs for extensive training, job modification, follow-along services, and/or employer and coworker preparation. Since 1986, a Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) service option, supported employment, has been the avenue by which many thousands of individuals with severe disabilities, often relegated to sheltered work or non-work programs, have become competitively employed (Wehman, Revell, & Kregel, 1997).

Supported employment is a combination of two service phases: (1) time-limited employment services primarily funded by state VR agencies, which could include job development and placement, training, and necessary job modifications; and (2) extended services such as periodic job skills reinforcement and on-going support, funded by non-VR sources. Typically, these non-VR sources have been state mental retardation, developmental disability or mental health funding agencies (Wehman et al., 1997). In most states, both time-limited and extended services are vendored by the state agencies to private provider agencies. Individuals who work with customers of supported employment services are often termed job coaches or employment specialists (Brooke, Inge, Armstrong, & Wehman, 1997).

The initial supported employment regulations (Federal Register, August 14, 1987) defined the target population as individuals with severe disabilities for whom competitive employment has not traditionally been an option, and for whom on-going support (i.e., extended services) are essential to maintaining competitive employment. The required minimal level of support for extended services is two contacts per month for job maintenance purposes. Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act in 1992 added language which redefined the target population as VR consumers "with the most severe disabilities" in an effort to insure that programs serve those who are truly in need of intensive and ongoing supports, but retained the minimum contact criterion (Federal Register, June 24, 1992).

The provision of extended services is a defining characteristic of supported employment, and the need for extended services a defining characteristic of eligible consumers. The direct linkage of the Rehabilitation Act and supported employment regulations to state VR programs has encouraged policy analysis and field research focusing on the time limited service phase, with less attention to the extended services component. While much theoretical and practical information is available (Albin & Slovic, 1992; Griffin, Test, Dalton, & Wood, 1995; West, 1992), supported employment research has not specifically addressed the types of services provided during this service phase, the types of funding methods employed, types of services provided, or other implementation issues. This area of research is essential to improving service efficiency and quality, and enhancing long-

term consumer employment outcomes, such as job retention and career advancement.

This investigation examined issues and practices related to the provision of extended services to supported employment consumers. In particular, the study addresses (1) the scope and nature of services provided during the extended services phase, (2) funding sources and methods utilized, and (3) the impact of funding methods on service quality.

METHOD

Participants

The survey participants were representatives of 385 randomly selected supported employment provider agencies located in 40 states. The mean supported employment caseload of responding agencies was 47.6 consumers. Additional characteristics of these agencies, their services, and consumers are presented below in Table 1. Respondents were typically coordinators of the supported employment program or executive directors of the agency.

Table 1
Characteristics of the Agencies Surveyed

1. Type of service catchment area:	
Urban	17.9%
Suburban	3.4%
Rural	38.8%
Mixed	39.8%
2. Disability groups served:	
Single disability groups	32.5%
Multiple disability groups	67.5%
3. Specific disability groups served (agencies serving single groups only):	
Mental retardation	69.9%
Mental illness	23.6%
Other disabilities	6.5%
4. Supported employment service models utilized:	
Individual placement only	50.4%
Group placement only	1.3%
Individual group placement	48.3%

Instrumentation

The data for this investigation were collected through the National Supported Employment Provider Survey conducted by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU-RRTC). The National Provider Survey was developed by the VCU-RRTC to elicit information via telephone on a number of issues pertaining to supported employment service delivery, such as unserved and underserved populations, use of natural supports, time-limited and extended services methods and funding, and use of Social Security Work Incentives. Items related to extended services were generated from discussions with providers, researchers, and advocates in the field. Prior to national administration, a pilot version of the National Provider Survey was administered to representatives of 10 supported employment agencies in Virginia who assessed face validity and response difficulty for the items.

Procedure

Sample selection. The survey sample was drawn from the population of providers of supported employment services as defined and funded under Title VI(C) of the Rehabilitation Act. State VR agency staff responsible for their respective state supported employment programs were contacted and requested to provide a current list of public and private agencies vendored for supported employment services in accordance with applicable state and federal VR regulations and policies. These lists were reviewed to insure that they were of recent origin, and appeared to contain only names of providers of supported employment. Follow-up contacts for clarification were made for state lists

that failed to meet these cri teria. A total of 40 usable vendor lists were obtained for sampling. The survey sample was completed through random selection with substitution. An average of 20% of confirmed providers were sampled, with sample sizes ranging from a minimum sample of 10% to a maximum sample of 25%.

Telephone surveys. Because of the extensive nature of the survey, telephone surveys were conducted over the course of approximately eight months by eight telephone interviewers. A survey script was developed that provided a consistent method for interviewers to identify appropriate respondents to the various minisurveys and lead respondents through the multiple sections. Most surveys required several telephone contacts to schedule and complete, with total survey time averaging approximately 45 minutes.

Data analysis. Quantitative data were aggregated using database and statistical software. Data analysis included computation of descriptive statistics (means and frequencies) and chi-square analyses. Responses to open-ended items were analyzed and interpreted qualitatively, through inductive content analysis and analyst-constructed typologies (Patton, 1990).

RESULTS

Of the 385 participating programs, 345 (89.6%) were vendored by public funding agencies to assist individuals with a significant disability successfully maintain competitive employment through extended supported employment services. This group constituted the respondent pool for additional questions related to extended services.

Scope of Extended Services

The mean extended services caseload was 27 individuals from an overall mean average supported employment caseload size of 47.6 consumers. Respondents were asked to identify the primary staff person providing extended services. Respondents most frequently identified the job coach/employment specialist who made the placement (56.2%), followed by a designated staff person (24.3%) and any available job coach/staff person (17.7%). A very small percentage (1.8%) of respondents indicated that their agency utilized individuals from outside the agency to provide follow-along services.

To determine the approximate percentage of consumers receiving more than minimal levels of extended services, respondents were requested to estimate the percentage of their consumers who typically received more than two extended service contacts per month. On average, 41% of the individuals in extended services received more than two follow-along contacts per month by staff of these agencies with a range from 0% to 100%.

Respondents were asked to identify up to three primary reasons extended services are needed for consumers. As shown in Table 2 below, respondents indicated a broad array of consumer needs which required provision of extended services. Monitoring of work performance was identified far more frequently than other need, with 42.9% of respondents indicating this was a primary need. Facilitating job changes/career movement was identified as a need by 28.7% of respondents.

Table 2

Reasons Why Extended Services is Needed for Consumers (n = 345)

Reasons for Providing Extended Services	Percent of Agencies
Monitor Work Performance	42.9%
Facilitate job changes/career movement	28.7%
Crisis intervention	19.1%
Monitor socialization, integration	15.4%
(Continued)	

Reasons for Providing Extended Services	Percent of Agencies
Support/training for employer/ coworkers	14.8%
Retraining in previously learned skills	13.9%
Assess job satisfaction	12.8%
Training in new skills	11.0%
Support to family or others	8.4%
Assess employer satisfaction	5.8%

Funding Sources for Extended Services

Responde nts were requested to identify their primary funding source for extended services. In contrast with time-limited services where VR agencies are the predominant funding agency, extended services are funded through a variety of sources, including state mental retardation or developmental disabilities agencies (27.2%), mental health agencies (20.7%), other state/local public agencies such as labor or health (18.4%), and the VR agency itself (11.2%).

Extended services funding was also drawn from the Medicaid Home and Community Based (HCB) Waiver, with 9.5% of respondents reporting this as their primary funding source. All other funding sources represented only 3.8% of responses to this item. A substantial portion of respondents (9.2%) did not have funding agreements for extended services, but reported that on-going services were funded by subcontract funds, as for work crew and enclave contracts, or from other facility revenues such as case management funds.

Funding Mechanisms for Extended Services

Respondents were also asked to identify the primary method by which they were reimbursed for providing extended services, with responses categorized in Table 3 on the following page. Three extended services funding categories emerged: (1) fee for service agreements (27.3% of respondents); (2) contractual or slot-based agreements (44.3%); and (3) other funding methods (28.4%), which included overhead costs built into work contracts, grant-funded services, absorption of costs by other facility budgets, and other unique agreements. A second key factor that emerged was whether payment rates were fixed or negotiated. Brief descriptions of these methods and response rates of each follows.

Fee for service agreements. Fee for service alternatives in supported employment establish a time specific fee rate for a defined service. The vendor receives payment of an agreed upon fee amount for the specific intervention time for which an employment specialist is engaged in providing services to a specified individual with a disability. This method breaks down the unit of service into small increments, frequently an hour, and tracks the length/intensity of service provided to participants.

There were three main fee for service alternatives reported. In the first, a statewide fixed hourly rate, the funding agency assigns a set rate for a service to all vendors. The second alternative, a negotiated hourly rate based on overall program costs, establishes a vendor specific rate with probable variations in the assigned rate from vendor to vendor based on differences in program costs and/or community level cost standards. This was the fee for service alternative most frequently utilized. The third alternative, negotiated hourly rates based on need and complexity of services, usually involves an effort by the funding agency to encourage vendors to respond to the needs of underserved persons within supported employment by negotiating a higher hourly fee rate the provision of comparatively more complex services. The same core service might carry different rates for persons with severe and persistent mental illness and for persons who are considered severely mentally retarded.

Table 3

Primary Funding Methods for Extended Supported Employment Services

Funding Mechanism	Frequency	Percent
I. Fee for Service Funding Alternatives (n = 94) Ia. Statewide fixed hourly rate for all agencies in state (35.1%) Ib. Negotiated hourly rate based on overall program cost (43.6%) Ic. Negotiated hourly rate allowing for different fees across disability groups or individual clients based on complexity of employment service needed (21.3%)	94	27.3%
II. Contract/Slot Based Alternatives IIa. Daily, weekly, or monthly rate (18.3%) IIb. Statewide fixed slot rate (14.4%) IIc. Yearly contract for specified number of slots (43.1%)	153	44.3%
III. Other funding methods	98	28.4%

Contract/slot based agreements. These agreements define a unit of service on a daily, weekly, monthly, or annual basis. Payment to the vendor requires participation by the individual with a disability in the service for that defined unit. In contrast to the hourly fee, units of service in these agreements are not designed to track intensity of services provided at an individual participant level. Here, contracts or service agreements for multiple units of services to a specified number of individuals are the typical funding mechanism in contrast to the individual participant service authorizations used with the hourly fee method.

Four different contract/slot based alternative methods were used by respondents. Agreements based on daily, weekly or monthly units of service involve reimbursement for the participation of identified supported employees in the service for the time frame defined by the unit. The second method, statewide fixed slot rates, required the vendor to establish and support a defined number of supported employment service slots. Payment is not tied to specific individuals served, but to maintaining fully occupied service slots, with all vendors in the state receiving the same rate. Negotiated slot rates differ from the statewide fixed slot rate approach only in that rates for the same service vary from vendor to vendor based on identified costs and/or community level rate standards. The final (and most frequently employed) method was yearly contracts for a specified number of units of service or slots where the funding agency sets a contracted annual target service level with the vendor, i.e., the funding agency might contract for a specific number of successful supported employment placements. The vendor agency is then responsible for organizing its resources during the contract year for achieving these placements.

Other funding methods. Primary use of other funding methods was identified by 28.4% of the respondents. Examples of other extended service funding methods reported by respondents include use of subcontract revenues to provide extended services to consumers in group options,

programs receiving grant-funded start-up funding, and agencies absorbing extended service costs from other revenue sources without formal agreements.

Impact of Funding Method on Service Quality

To study the potential impacts of these different funding methods on delivery and management of extended services, respondents were asked whether their primary funding method: (1) allowed payment of sufficient attention to consumer choices, such as decisions about job changes; (2) discouraged replacement of someone in supported employment who lost their job; and (3) discouraged movement of participants and resources from segregated employment to community based employment. Respondents reporting primary use of other funding methods are not reported because of the variability of the responses in this category.

Table 4 presents the rate of affirmative responses across all funding methods to each of the three questions. On key questions regarding conversion of resources, 40% of the respondents indicated their primary funding method did discourage movement from segregated services to community based employment. About three-fourths (74%) of the respondents indicated their primary funding method allowed for sufficient attention to consumer choice. Chi-square tests (see Table 5 on the following page) found statistically significant differentiation among the impact of funding methods for two of the three questions, as described below.

Allowing sufficient attention to consumer choices. The statistical differentiation among responses to this question was most significant for vendors utilizing a statewide fixed hourly rate. Their positive response rate of 53.3% was significantly lower than for the other funding methods ($\chi^2[7,345]=14.5$, $p<.05$). Reimbursements through fixed hourly rate were viewed as least supportive of consumer choice. As a group, the response rates for negotiated rate options were consistently more positive than for statewide fixed rate options.

Table 4

Impact of Funding Method on the Delivery of Extended Supported Employment Services

Impact of Primary Funding Method	Overall Yes Response
Allows payment of sufficient attention to consumer choice	74.0%
Discourages replacing someone who loses his or her job	16.7%
Discourages willingness to move clients and resources from segregated to community-based employment	40.0%

Discouraging movement to community based employment. Of the 345 respondents that provided extended services, the 235 that operated programs offering segregated services responded to this question. Providers funded by a statewide fixed hourly rate indicated that this funding method discouraged movement from segregated services to community based employment at a significantly higher rate (61.5%) than other funding methods. In contrast, the negotiated slot rate method discouraged resource reallocation at a significantly lower rate (12.5%) than other funding methods ($c^2[7,235]=20.9$, $p<.01$). The response rates for providers under negotiated rate options were consistently more positive in supporting conversion than those providers under statewide fixed rate options.

Impact of Funding Source on Service Quality

Responses to the above questions were also analyzed by funding source, using the primary sources identified previously (i.e., state mental retardation/developmental disability agency, mental health agency, state VR agency, other state agencies, and Medicaid HCB Waiver), again through chi-square analysis. One significant finding emerged (see

Table 5

Impact of Funding Method on the Delivery and Management of Extended Supported Employment Services

Type of Agreement	Allows time to pay sufficient attention to consumer choices	Discourages movement of clients and resources to community based employment
Statewide hourly rate	53.3%	61.5%
Hourly rate based on overall program cost	75.6%	30.0%
Negotiated hourly rate based on complexity of services	85.0%	27.8%
Daily, weekly, or monthly rate	63.0%	54.2%
Statewide fixed slot rate	63.6%	38.5%
Negotiated slot rate	83.8%	12.5%
Yearly contract for specified number of slots	81.3%	47.8%
Other funding methods	74.4%	43.5%
F Score for Responses	14.5*	20.9**
	* $p < .05$	** $p < .01$

Table 6). Respondents funded primarily through HCB Waivers were more likely to respond that using this source for extended services funding did not discourage them from moving consumers and resources from segregated to community-based employment, while those funded primarily by the state VR agency were more likely to indicate that the funding source did discourage them from moving consumers and resources to community-based employment ($\chi^2[4,206]=18.6$, $p<.001$).

Recommendations for Changes in Extended Services Funding

Each respondent was also asked to identify up to three changes or recommendations they would make to their extended services funding to improve the quality of services. The most frequently indicated areas were: open up more funding sources for extended services (28.7%), expand types of services funded as extended services (15.4%), and increase fee-for-service amounts (11.3%).

DISCUSSION

As stated previously, extended services are a defining characteristic of supported employment and the need for extended services is the defining characteristic of the program's target population. This investigation is an initial attempt to identify current practices and perceptions of providers of extended services with regard to this essential service component.

Table 6

Respondents Indicating that Funding Source Discourages Movement of Consumers and Resources to Community-Based Employment

State mental retardation/developmental disability agency	50.0%
State mental health agency	27.5%
State vocational rehabilitation agency	58.3%
Other state agency	47.9%
Medicaid Home and Community-Based Waiver	14.4%
F Score for Responses	20.9**
*** $p < .001$	

One of the logistical difficulties faced by supported employment providers is the need to continually initiate new p lacements while maintaining previously placed individuals. This is no small task, considering the finding from this study that extended services cases represented approximately 57% of the average agency's supported employment caseload. Adding to this logistical difficulty is that in most agencies the staff member making the placement is also responsible for extended services, thereby limiting his or her time to devote to new consumers. Fewer agencies reported that they had an employment specialist designated to provide extended services. While this option might be more efficient, it requires a trade-off of familiarity and comfort between the consumer, employer, and the employment specialist who provided the initial training.

In recent years, the use of "natural supports," i.e., family, friends, coworkers, supervisors, and others, has been embraced by the field (Butterworth, Whitney-Thomas, & Shaw, 1997; Hagner, 1995; Kiernan, Schalock, Butterworth, & Sailor, 1993; West, Kregel, Hernandez, & Hock, in press) and endorsed by the 1992 Rehabilitation Act Amendments as an extended service option. Increasing the capacities of coworkers and supervisors to provide essential supports can alleviate some of the logistical problems associated with maintaining consumers in extended services while initiating services to new consumers. Yet, when asked to identify the primary reason that extended services were provided, only 14.8% of respondents indicated that coworker or supervisor support and/or training was one of their three primary reasons, with substantially more frequent responses for employment specialist-delivered services, such as monitoring work performance and socialization, and crisis intervention. This seeming disparity may signal that natural supports in the workplace are being inadequately developed by provider agencies or may be inadequate for achieving long-term job maintenance with individuals with extensive support needs. Maximizing the use and effectiveness of natural supports for supported employment consumers is undoubtedly an area in which providers are in need of technical assistance and practical research.

Additionally, career development and self-determination of individuals with disabilities have received much attention in the rehabilitation literature and service delivery (Pumpian, Fisher, Certo, & Smalley, 1997). However, these areas were not widely reported as an extended service need. Facilitating job changes and career movement, although the second most frequently reported activity, was reported by only 28.7% of respondents. Also reported infrequently were assessment of job satis-faction (12.8%) and training in new skills (11.0%), perhaps indications that career development and self-determination are being given far less attention in extended services than maintaining individuals in their current positions.

A significant finding of this investigation is that approximately six of ten extended service recipients received only the minimum levels of service, that is, two job maintenance contacts per month. Respondents' estimates for this item were

highly variable, ranging fr om 0% (i.e., no one gets more than the minimally required level of follow-along support) to 100% (everyone receives more than the minimal level). Approximately one-fourth (25.5%) of all respondents indicated that 25% or less of their consumers received more than two contacts per month and 37.7% indicated that 75% or more received more than two contacts.

In establishing the minimal service criteria, the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), which has oversight of state VR services, recognized the need of many individuals with severe disabilities to receive ongoing support to maintain competitive employment. The data from this study suggest that supported employment providers show remarkably diverse degrees of endorsement for the program's mission of serving those with the most extensive and challenging support needs.

Although state mental retardation/developmental disability and mental health agencies were the primary sources of extended service funds, respondents used a broad spectrum of funding sources and methods for extended services. Other primary sources included state VR agencies, state departments of health or labor, private non-profit sources, and other sources. A sizable proportion (9.2%) reported that they had no formal agreements for funding extended services but used subcontract revenues, case management funds, or other internal methods to absorb the costs of extended services.

In addition to mental retardation, developmental disabilities, mental health, and other state agencies, 9.5% of agencies reported that their primary source of extended services funding was through Medicaid HCB Waiver programs. These funds can only be used for providing supported employment to a very limited and clearly defined group of individuals who meet funding restrictions imposed by Medicaid policies, i.e., a history of institutionalization (which is imposed on no other HCB Waiver-funded service) and inability to access services through primary agencies (the VR system). Given the restrictive nature of this funding source, the number of agencies using it as a primary source for extended services is substantial. Removal of one or both of these restrictions would be a factor in bringing more facility consumers into supported employment.

Contractual or slot-based agreements were the primary method of reimbursing agencies for providing extended services, reported by 44.3% of respondents. Fee for service agreements were reported by 27.3% of agencies, with other funding methods used by 28.4% of the respondents. This latter response rate reflects the sometimes non-traditional or patchwork funding arrangements used for extended services. In a related study on time limited services, only 10.8% of the respondents indicated primary use of funding methods other than fee for service or contract/slot based funding (Revell, West, & Cheng, in press).

Perhaps the most significant findings of the study relate to the impact of funding methods and sources on service quality, particularly consumer choice and movement from segregated to community based services. There has been much speculation regarding this interrelationship of these variables (c.f., Mank, 1994; Wehman & Kregel, 1995; West, 1995), but no empirical validation. In this study, respondents who were reimbursed using state-wide fixed hourly rates indicated that their funding method (1) was less responsive to consumer choice and (2) discouraged movement of consumers and resources from segregated to community based programs.

With regard to consumer choice, the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 emphasize the importance of consumer choice in the establishment of job and career goals and the selection of services. Vendors of extended services have a responsibility to respond positively to choices made by consumers and particularly those regarding job changes, an essential component of career development (Pumpian et al., 1997). However, the use of fixed hourly rates may present financial disincentives for providers in assisting

individuals to make voluntar y job changes for the purpose of career advancement or simply locating a better job match.

With regard to movement from segregated programs to supported employment, the Rehabilitation Act unambiguously endorses competitive employment as the option of choice for all individuals regardless of the extent of their disabilities. Yet supported employment staffing and consumers remain small in comparison to segregated, facility-based services (McGaughey et al., 1995; McGaughey et al, 1993). The staff and funds currently committed to supporting center based, work related services segregated from the competitive labor force represent a substantial potential resource for expanding supported employment opportunities (West, Wehman, & Revell, in press). Funding methods are needed that encourage and support service providers to expand community based service capacity. For example, flexible rate systems can be designed to cover excess costs to providers for serving individuals with more intensive support needs or employment barriers, or provide incentives for assisting consumers to achieve more positive outcomes in terms of job choice, wages, benefits, and integration.

The findings of this study, as do those from a similar investigation of VR-funded time limited services (Revell et al., 1997), confirm that negotiable rate systems are preferable to fixed rate systems in encouraging this expansion. Negotiated rates give consideration to differences across providers, communities, consumers, and outcomes, such as the scope of services provided under the hourly rate; staff expertise; past success rates in terms of consumer salaries and benefits, retention, or satisfaction with services; problems encountered in serving consumers in rural areas; and the types or levels of support needs of consumers. Also, in many states, extended services are reimbursed at the same levels as for facility-based services funded under the same authority. When providers are able to negotiate higher rates for services with more valued outcomes such as community based employment, they will be more likely to expand those options for their consumers. These conclusions were echoed by the survey respondents who were requested to make recommendations for changes to the extended services funding system. Their responses reflect the perceived need for additional funding options and reimbursement amounts as well as increased flexibility in the freedom providers have in delivering extended services.

Finally, the study found that those agencies which received primary funding for extended services through Medicaid HCB Waivers responded more positively regarding movement of consumers from segregated to community-based options, while those funded primarily through the state VR agency were more discouraged. As mentioned previously, HCB Waiver funds can be used to fund supported employment for a narrowly defined segment of potential consumers, but can also be used to fund segregated day support programs. VR funds separate from those appropriated under the Rehabilitation Act are sometimes used to fund extended services for individuals or groups for whom there are no existing funding sources. Further research is needed in state-level policies for using both HCB Waiver and VR funds for extended services, and how provider agencies utilize those sources.

CONCLUSION

This investigation has provided insight into current practices and methods used to provide and fund extended services in supported employment. The key findings suggest that provider agencies are underutilizing natural support networks within consumers' workplaces for essential extended support needs. Additionally, few agencies indicated that career development and consumer satisfaction are a primary focus of extended services. The majority

of consumer s (six of ten) were found to be receiving only the minimal level of extended services contacts.

Several key findings were related to funding issues. Providers who were able to negotiate rates for extended services responded more positively to questions regarding the relationship of funding method to (1) attention to consumer choice and (2) movement of consumers and agency resources to community-based employment. This finding suggests that initiating flexible rate schedules based on consumer, provider, or community variables may be an important and effective strategy for promoting systems change from segregated to integrated services, and for achieving the goals of the Rehabilitation Act for consumer self-determination and competitive employment as the option of choice for all.

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Abstract

This article reports findings from a survey of 385 supported employment provider agencies on their use of natural supports in time-limited and extended services. An overwhelming majority of 85% of all respondents reported that natural supports are emphasized by their agency in the delivery of supported employment services and have generally been successful and useful for all individuals on their caseloads. Among the problems identified by the respondents were resistance to natural supports by employers and coworkers, as well as difficulty in locating natural supports at the job site. Results are discussed in terms of the need for quality assurance procedures in supported employment programs.

EVERYBODY'S DOING IT: A NATIONAL SURVEY OF THE USE OF NATURAL SUPPORTS IN SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

By: Michael West, John Kregel, Ana Hernandez & Thomas Hock

The enhancement and individualization of natural supports for persons with disabilities has received much attention in recent years (Bradley, Ashbaugh, & Blaney, 1994; Nisbet, 1992). "Natural supports" refers to the resources inherent to community environments which can be utilized for habilitative and supportive purposes (Kiernan, Schalock, Butterworth, & Sailor, 1993). Using natural supports has been advanced as a cost-effective means of achieving maximum integration at school, work, and other community settings for individuals with severe disabilities (Nisbet, 1992; Nisbet & Hagner, 1987).

The use of natural supports has added significance for individuals receiving services under the Federal/state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program. Supported employment combines both intensive, time-limited services funded by the VR agency with ongoing support and follow-along (i.e., extended services) funded by a non-VR source. This VR option is intended for individuals with the most severe disabilities who would otherwise not be able to work in competitive jobs. The 1992 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act (PL 102-569) endorse natural supports as a source of extended services for individuals receiving supported employment (Sec. 635[b][6][C][iii]). For many groups of potential supported employment participants, particularly those with disabilities acquired in adulthood, access to supported employment may have been limited because no source of funding for extended services was available at the time of VR enrollment (West, Revell, & Wehman, 1992).

Natural supports within the VR service context was intended to be a broad term meant to include (1) individuals at the job site, such as employers, supervisors, or coworkers; (2) friends or family members who provide supportive roles; or (3) volunteers or mentors from work or the community (Senate Report 102-357). Recently, several writers in the field have further broadened the context of natural supports to include other types of community and workplace resources, such as employee assistance programs, transportation providers, community service organizations, recreational and social associations, and governmental supports that are not limited to persons with disabilities, such as subsidized housing, income tax assistance, etc. (Albin & Slovic, 1992; Parent, Unger, Gibson, & Clements, 1994; Rheinheimer, VanCovern, Green, Revell, & Inge, 1993; Rogan, Hagner, & Murphy, 1993).

The role of employers and coworkers in supporting employees with severe disabilities has emerged with potential to improve supported employment outcomes. However, there is little data about the impact of natural supports. In a comprehensive review of research literature on the effectiveness of natural supports in supported employment, Test and Wood (1996) found that (1) the concept of natural supports often poorly defined

or not defined at all, (2) natural support strategies are often nebulous and difficult to replicate, and (3) little empirical evidence exists to justify the widespread use of natural supports and the incorporation of the concept into federal employment policy.

The available information to date about natural supports in supported employment is almost exclusively qualitative information and case studies. These case studies offer an appealing array of what is possible in the typical employment of people in supported employment and the roles that employer personnel can play in supporting the employment of people with severe disabilities. These studies (e.g., Hagner & Dileo, 1993; Murphy, Rogan, & Fisher, 1994) show an increase in the integration and stability of supported employment participants when coworkers are involved with the employee with severe disabilities. For example, a recent report from a demonstration project for enhancing natural supports for individuals with severe mental illness (West & Parent, 1995) included the number and type of support needs that were identified and addressed.

At the same time, however, some professionals (e.g., Test & Wood, 1996) are concerned the lack of quantitative information on the efficacy of natural supports does not provide a sound empirical basis for policy and program decision-making. Only recently has quantitative information begun to be available about typical features of employment and natural supports. Mank, Cioffi & Yovanoff (1996a, b) have constructed a data base of nearly 500 individuals (from eight states) in supported employment placed in jobs by programs thought to be implementing natural supports in the work place. These data show a positive relationship between high wages, higher patterns of interaction with employees without disabilities and the "typicalness" of the features of their employment (when compared to coworkers without disabilities). This data set provides one of the first broader, quantitative data sets that can provide useful information to consumers, community rehabilitation providers and policy-makers on the efficacy of natural support strategies.

Some professionals have expressed caution about the directions that the natural supports initiative might take. Kregel (1994) and West and Parent (1995) note that natural support methods are being advanced as alternatives to the traditional "job coaching" model of supported employment, when in fact coworker and supervisor involvement has been a component of "best practices" since the program's inception. The controversy over the use of natural supports in supported employment has significant implications for the long-term future of the program (DeLeo, 1995; West, 1992). Wehman (1993) and West (1992) both express concern that the research base on social acceptance of persons with disabilities in the workplace does not support programmatic dependence on coworkers and supervisors.

Clearly, if natural supports strategies are to become the foundation of employment service delivery for individuals with significant disabilities in supported employment, then investigations into the nature and effectiveness of supported employment strategies must be expanded. This study is to our knowledge the first attempt to conduct a large-scale examination of the current use of natural support technology in supported employment operated by local community rehabilitation programs throughout the United States. The specific questions which were addressed include:

1. How extensively are natural supports utilized in the field?
2. What do provider agencies consider to be "natural" supports?
3. What types of problems have been encountered in developing and utilizing natural supports for supported employment participants?
4. What if any effects has the increasing use of natural supports had on the provider agency and staff?

METHOD

Participants

Sample selection. The survey sample was drawn from the population of providers of supported employment services as defined and funded under Title VI(C) of the Rehabilitation Act. State vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency staff responsible for their respective state supported employment programs were contacted and requested to provide a current list of public and private agencies vendored for supported employment services in accordance with applicable state and federal VR regulations and policies. The lists were reviewed upon receipt to insure that they were of recent origin, and appeared to contain only names of supported employment providers. Follow-up contacts were made for state lists that failed to meet these criteria. A total of 40 usable vendor lists was obtained. The survey sample was drawn through random selection with replacement. An average sample of 20% of confirmed providers was surveyed, with sample sizes ranging from a minimum state sample of 10% to a maximum sample of 25%.

The survey participants were representatives of 385 randomly selected supported employment provider agencies in 40 states. The mean supported employment caseload of responding agencies was 47.6 consumers. Additional characteristics of these agencies, their services, and consumers are presented in Table 1. Respondents were typically coordinators of the supported employment program or executive directors of the agency.

Instrumentation

The data for this investigation were collected through the Natural Supports Section of the National Supported Employment Provider Survey, conducted by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU-RRTC). The National Provider Survey was developed by the VCU-RRTC to elicit information via telephone on a number of issues pertaining to supported employment service delivery, such as unserved and underserved populations, funding issues, use of Social Security Work Incentives, and natural supports. The main survey requested demographic information for the agency, followed by a single item pertaining to each of the major issues. A "yes" response on the main survey indicated that the appropriate section should be completed. For the purposes of the Natural Supports Section, the main survey item was: "Does your program emphasize the use of natural supports in the delivery of supported employment services?"

The Natural Supports Section, along with all elements of the National Provider Survey, were developed through multiple levels of item

Table 1

Characteristics of the Agencies Surveyed

1. Type of service catchment area:	
Urban	17.9%
Suburban	3.4%
Rural	38.8%
Mixed	39.8%
2. Disability groups served:	
Single disability groups	32.5%
Multiple disability groups	67.5%
3. Specific disability groups served (agencies serving single groups only):	
Mental retardation	69.9%
Mental illness	23.6%
Other disabilities	6.5%
4. Supported employment service models utilized:	
Individual placement only	50.4%
Group placement only	1.3%
Individual and group placement	48.3%

submission and review both internally and externally. A pilot version of the National Provider Survey was administered by telephone to representatives of 10 supported employment agencies in Virginia, who were then requested to give their impressions of the face validity and response difficulty for the items. The final version of the Natural Supports Section contained 10 items relating to (1) the types of natural supports that the agency had utilized; (2) the use of natural supports within the service delivery process; (3) the respondent's perceptions of the efficacy of using natural supports for the program's caseload; (4) estimates of time and effort developing natural supports; and (5) problems encountered in accessing and using natural supports for their supported employment clients.

Procedure

Telephone surveys - Due to the extensive nature of the survey, telephone surveys were conducted over the course of approximately eight months by eight telephone interviewers. A survey script was developed that provided a consistent method for interviewers to identify appropriate respondents to the various sections and determine convenient times to conduct the interviews. Most surveys required multiple telephone contacts to schedule and complete, and required from approximately 10 minutes to 2 hours (mean 47 minutes), depending on the number of sections that were indicated from the main survey.

Data management and analysis. Quantitative data were aggregated using spreadsheet and analytical software, Microsoft Excel 5.0. Data analysis included computation of descriptive statistics, means and frequencies. Responses to open-ended items were analyzed and interpreted qualitatively, through inductive content analysis and analyst-constructed typologies (Patton, 1990).

RESULTS

Of the 385 agencies surveyed , 328 (85.2%) respondents indicated that their agency emphasized natural supports in the delivery of supported employment services. Respondents were also requested to identify the service phases in which natural supports were typically utilized. Almost all indicated that natural supports were used in job site training (93.3%) and extended services phases (96.0%). Fewer reported that natural supports were used in consumer assessment (66.1%) or job development activities (78.3%). As follow-ups to this item, respondents were asked to further quantify use of natural supports in various program phases. Responses to these items are included in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Use of Natural Supports in Various Program Phases

Survey Item	Mean
Approximately what percent of your consumers' jobs were found through the social networks and contacts of consumers, their families and friends?	15.9%
Approximately how much observation time is spent on average at a job site prior to a consumer's first day on the job?	9.1 hrs.
What percent of your caseload have you used coworkers or supervisors to provide initial training in work skills and behaviors?	41.5%
With what percent of your caseload have you used coworkers or supervisors to provide ongoing monitoring and follow-along services?	56.3%
With what percent of your caseload have you modified a job to build in opportunities for social interactions with coworkers?	21.9%

Respondents were asked if natural supports had generally been useful and relevant for all individuals on their supported employment caseload, with the overwhelming majority (266, 81.8%) indicating that they had found this to be so. As a follow-up, those who responded negatively (59, 18.2%) were asked to identify up to two cases or examples where natural supports had not been useful. Their responses are summarized in Table 3 below. The most frequently occurring response was that some types of workplaces were not conducive to enhancing existing supports, such as those which are fast-paced, highly competitive, or generally non-supportive. Different types of consumer characteristics were also identified as inhibiting natural support development, such as consumer behavioral, medical, or social characteristics, consumer disability classification, or the severity of consumers' disabilities.

Table 3

Examples of Cases Where Natural Supports Were Not Useful (n=59)

Reason	Number	Percent
Based on type of job or workplace (i.e., high pressure or competition	20	33.9%
Based on consumer characteristics (i.e., behaviors, needs, etc.)	13	22.0%
Based on disability classification (i.e., mental illness)	9	15.3%
Based on severity of disability	9	15.3%
Based on other reasons	8	13.6%

Types of Natural Supports

Respondents were requested to provide up to three types of natural supports which they had used in service delivery and the functions for which they had been utilized. Most often, respondents reported using coworkers (70.1%), followed by family or friends (43.9%), employer resources such as employee assistance programs (34.1%), community involvement such as service organizations (19.8%), consumers' own resources such as earnings and automobiles (7.3%), and other persons or organizations such as churches or governmental agencies (3.4%). Frequently reported functions included transportation (46.1%), job site training (40.4%), ongoing monitoring (27.0%), social skills training or social support (20.2%), community or residential support (16.9%), job development (7.9%), and other functions (4.5%).

Problems in the Use of Natural Supports

Respondents were asked if they had encountered any major obstacles or problems in using natural supports, with over one-half (51.5%) indicated that they had. As a follow-up, those who had responded affirmatively were asked to describe up to three problems. These responses are summarized in Table 4 on the following page. Most frequently, respondents reported that they had encountered active resistance from others on the job site to performing training and support functions. Slightly more than a third (35.9%) indicated that they had experienced difficulty in locating either individuals or resources at the job site for support functions, but without active resistance. Twenty-eight respondents (16.8%) indicated that sometimes natural support providers could not perform their responsibilities as effectively or as efficiently as the job coach, and 11 (6.6%) believed that their consumers' job retention had been reduced as a result of increased reliance on natural supports.

Effects of Natural Supports on the Provider Agency

Respondents were asked if the role of the agency or its staff had changed substantially since it began to emphasize natural supports. Over half (51.5%)

Table 4

Problems Encountered in Developing and Using Natural Supports (n = 167)

	Frequency	Percent
Resistance from employers, supervisors, or coworkers	71	42.5%
Difficulty locating natural supports at job site	60	35.9%
Reduction in program effectiveness or efficiency	28	16.8%
Resistance from families	13	7.8%
Dissatisfaction from employers	11	6.6%
Lower job retention	11	6.6%
Lack of consumer advocacy on the job	8	4.8%
Dissatisfaction from consumers	5	3.0%
Difficult to place/maintain consumers with very severe disabilities using natural supports	5	3.0%
Other problems	12	7.2%

indicated that changes had occurred. As a follow-up, respondents were requested to describe the changes that occurred. These responses are summarized in Table 5. Most frequently, respondents reported that the functions of staff had changed in that they engaged in less direct job site training and monitoring, and more time facilitating coworker training and other supports. Approximately one-third (32.5%) indicated that staff spent less time at the job site, either in terms of reduced presence during the consumers' daily work hours or a reduction in duration of time-limited services. Approximately a fourth (23.5%) indicated they had made modifications in the types of commitments or promises that had been made to employers during job development, such as reduced crisis management. A small number of agencies (13.3%) indicated they had changed their staff job descriptions to emphasize facilitation of natural supports.

Table 5

Changes in Agency or Staff Roles Due to Emphasis on Natural Supports (n = 166)

	Frequency	Percent
Staff/agency functions or responsibilities	74	44.6%
Staff time on job site	54	32.5%
Staff/agency commitments to employer	39	23.5%
Changes in staff job descriptions	22	13.3%
Other changes	11	6.6%
Unable to specify	12	7.2%

DISCUSSION

Before discussing the findings of the survey, some caveats are in order. First, the survey respondents were selected from supported employment provider agency lists which were received from state VR agencies. Current and complete lists were not obtained from 10 states. This raises the possibility of sampling error for the survey; however, to the best of our knowledge and abilities to define the population, a random sample of provider agencies was obtained. Second, on a number of questions respondents were requested to estimate quantitative data, such as percentages and number of hours. No controls could be instituted regarding the accuracy of these estimates. Still, the findings have usefulness in that they represent the respondents' perceptions of the extent and value of natural supports in their overall service delivery, and key issues regarding the use of natural supports in the workplace.

Extent of Use of Natural Supports

The use of existing community and workplace supports in the vocational habilitation of persons with severe disabilities is a fairly recent idea (Nisbet & Hagner, 1987). Yet, the findings of this survey indicate that the natural supports concept has been embraced by the field of supported employment and is used extensively in almost all phases of service. Over 85% of the agencies surveyed indicated that they emphasize natural supports in the delivery of supported employment.

Those agencies that emphasize natural supports reported that they have used coworkers or supervisors for initial training for an average of 41.5% of their consumers; for ongoing monitoring and support, this increases to over half (56.3%) of their consumers. Natural supports appear to be used far less frequently in job development and placement, although the family-and-friends network is the typical avenue for early employment experiences for most persons starting out in the work world.

These findings give clear and powerful support to the argument made by Test and Wood (1996) that the lack of a clear and concise definition of natural supports makes it difficult to conduct research into the effectiveness of these important strategies. When 85% of all programs indicate that they "emphasize the use of natural supports" in service delivery, the dichotomy of "natural supports vs. the job coach" of supported employment is no longer relevant. It is unequivocally clear that virtually all programs are using components from a number of different supported employment models in the design and delivery of services. Natural support strategies have become an integral component of supported employment.

Limited View of Natural Supports

There appears to be consensus among provider agencies regarding what constitutes a natural support. However, the natural supports that are being utilized for supported employment agencies appear to be limited in scope. When local programs describe their use of natural supports, they are almost always talking about the involvement of coworkers in the provision of job skill training or ongoing monitoring. Programs are far less likely to describe efforts at involving employer resources (i.e. employee assistance programs), family members or friends, consumer resources, or community involvement (e.g. civic groups, professional organizations, churches, etc.) In the natural support effort. In addition, most programs seem familiar with using natural support strategies during the training and follow-along stages of supported employment. Natural supports are used far less frequently during the consumer assessment, job development, and job placement phases of supported employment.

Programs implementing supported employment services should give greater attention to

efforts to include family members, friends, neighbors, and members of the community at large in the implementation of supported employment. This is particularly true when attempting to assess consumer job preferences and identify potential jobs. Family members and relatives can provide valuable insight into a consumer's likes and dislikes, skills and limitations. This information can be used, not to exclude an individual from employment, but rather to focus subsequent job development efforts on employment options that may be relevant and satisfying to the consumer. Similarly, friends and neighbors can be tremendous resources in identifying available jobs, providing job leads and making informal contacts on behalf of the consumer. Parent and her colleagues (1994) have developed several effective methods of involving family members and friends in consumer assessment and job development activities.

Services to Individuals with the Most Significant Disabilities

As noted previously, some professionals have expressed concern about the growing emphasis on natural supports and the impact on persons with very severe disabilities. For example, West (1992) cautioned that the system's movement toward models of natural supports might serve to further exclude individuals with extensive support needs which are beyond the capabilities of coworkers or supervisors. These are individuals who are largely underserved in supported employment already (Kregel & Wehman, 1989), and who might find access to services even further limited.

The findings of this survey do not directly answer this question, but they do point to the potential impact of natural support methodologies on service access for these individuals. An encouraging finding is that better than eight of ten respondents indicated that they had found natural supports to be useful and relevant for all members of their caseload, including, presumably, those who are the most difficult to place, train, and maintain in employment. Among those reporting to the contrary, the primary reason was based not on the types of individuals served, but by characteristics of the employment settings into which individuals were being placed. Among the reported instances where natural supports did not "work" were such factors as fast-paced or high stress jobs or environments, highly competitive businesses, and workplaces that weren't particularly friendly to any worker, disabled or not.

However, a number of agencies reported they did not find natural supports to be useful for consumers based on specific problems or limitations, disability labels, or disability level. It is impossible to determine from present data whether or not their experiences contributed to any appreciable degree to the selection of clients for the program or specific job openings, but this is an important question that should be addressed. The lack of participation by individuals with significant disabilities was one of the major reasons cited by Nisbet and Hagner (1987) to justify the importance of natural support strategies. Wehman, Revell, and Kregel (1997), however, recently reported that little has been done since 1988 to increase the rate of participation in supported employment by individuals with severe cognitive disabilities, autism, cerebral palsy or dual diagnoses. Future research should continue to investigate the extent to which the increasing use of natural support strategies has facilitated or hindered efforts to promote participation of individuals with significant support needs.

Problems in Accessing Natural Supports

Most programs feel that the use of natural supports has contributed to the overall success of supported employment. However, two-thirds of programs using natural supports indicate they have experienced problems implementing natural support strategies. These problems overwhelmingly fall into two areas. First, employers are unwilling to

implement natural support strategies recommended by the supported employment program and are "resisting" the notion that they should assume sole responsibility for the training, supervision and support of the employee with a disability. Second, local programs are having a difficult time identifying staff members with skills necessary to implement natural support strategies, as well as providing training to current staff members in the use of natural support techniques.

The development of close working relationships with employers and the availability of highly skilled staff members are important issues for all supported employment programs. The findings described above illustrate the difficulty involved in separating problems inherent within the natural support model from implementation issues that affect all types of supported employment programs, regardless of the specific support strategies or service delivery models used. Consider, for example, a local supported employment program which seems to place unreasonable expectations on the role an employer can or should play in supporting an individual in a work setting, such as demanding that the employer free up supervisors and coworkers for several hours per day for several weeks to provide training to new supported employee. This is more accurately a reflection of the overall quality of the local supported employment program, rather than an indication that natural supports may not work. Similarly, in some parts of the country, full-time employment specialists make as little as $12,000 per year in what are considered to be essentially paraprofessional positions. In these situations, it is difficult to expect the employment specialist to be thoroughly experienced in skills such as program marketing, job carving, person centered planning, and other specialized strategies. This problem may be more a reflection of a state or agency's view of the role of employment specialists, rather than a shortcoming in the natural support model.

Impact on Service Quality

Taken in total, the perceptions of the respondents clearly illustrate the changing nature of supported employment service delivery. Natural supports have become so interwoven with all facets of supported employment implementation that it is no longer relevant to discuss the efficacy of natural supports versus the success of the job coach model of supported employment. It is no longer helpful to criticize natural support programs that place individuals into situations without providing sufficient support to enable the individual to retain employment for an extended period of time, or chastise "job coach" programs that create unnecessary employer dependence on the presence and assistance of the job coach. Instead, it is now time to focus our energies on identifying those global program characteristics that contribute to a program's ability to generate high quality, satisfying employment outcomes for individuals, regardless of the philosophical orientation of the program.

At the level of the local supported employment program, there are really no longer "pure" natural support programs or job coach programs. In reality, most local supported employment programs use a variety of different service delivery techniques. Far more important is the recognition that some supported employment programs are far more successful than others in terms of their ability to generate high quality employment outcomes for the consumer receiving services. Understanding the factors that contribute to individuals in one supported employment earning higher wages, retaining their jobs for a longer period of time, experiencing a larger degree of integration in their work setting and expressing greater satisfaction with their job is a complex activity. It involves a close examination of the demographic and functional characteristics of the individual consumers, the characteristics of the service program, and the monetary and non-

monetary outcomes experienced by the individual consumer.

While identifying these factors is a complex process, its potential contribution to state and local supported employment programs is enormous. State agencies may use this information to assess differences in employment outcomes across various agencies and provide technical assistance designed to enhance service quality. Local programs can use this information to implement self-evaluation and quality assurance procedures, as well as market their efforts to individual consumers and funding agencies. Consumers and their families can begin to use this type of information to analyze the likely outcomes of supported employment participation and choose among various service provider agencies.

CONCLUSION

The local supported employment programs participating in this study are emphasizing the use of natural supports in the design and delivery of supported employment services. The majority of these programs indicated that natural support strategies are highly effective. Natural supports are used most often in the job training and monitoring phase of supported employment. Relatively little emphasis has been placed on the use of natural supports in the consumer assessment and job development phases of the program. A small but significant percentage report problems in the implementation of natural support strategies, particularly related to the willingness of employers to participate in job training, supervision and monitoring activities at a level necessary to sustain employment.

Research is needed to determine the key elements of supported employment service delivery that most effectively allow individuals to obtain and maintain jobs of their choice. Is the agency totally committed to the delivery of integrated employment services? Have efforts been made to recruit, train and retain highly skilled, dedicated staff members? Are consumer choices and preferences the basis of service delivery and are consumers satisfied with the services they receive? Does the program market its services aggressively and make changes to program design based on feedback from consumers, family members, employers and other organizations in the community? In the end, these types of quality indicators will likely represent the factors that most accurately determine the effectiveness and success of a supported employment program.

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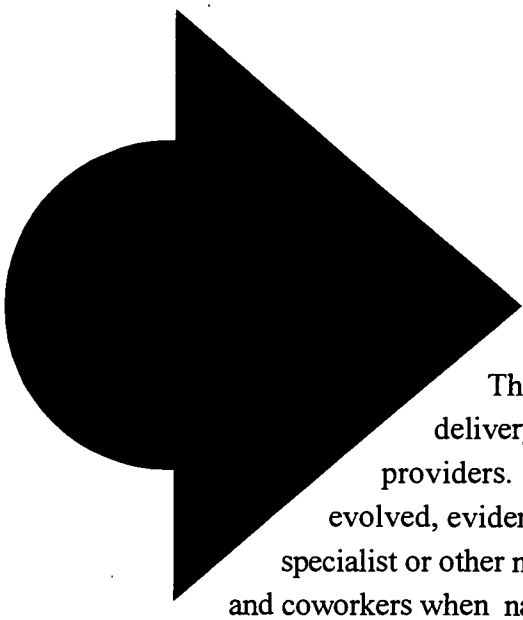

Abstract

The use of natural supports during supported employment service delivery has emerged as a widespread practice of supported employment providers. Though a number of strategies for using natural supports have evolved, evidence is clearly limited which describes the role of the employment specialist or other non-traditional support resources, such as family members, friends, and coworkers when natural supports are utilized during supported employment. This investigation focuses on the activities of a supported employment program's initial efforts to document the activities of employment specialists and other non-traditional support providers when an emphasis in placed on using community and workplace supports during the provision of supported employment.

An Analysis of the Activities of Employment Specialist in a Natural Support Approach to Supported Employment

By: Darlene Unger, Wendy Parent, Karen Gibson, Kelly Kane-Johnston, & John Kregel

Introduction

Since its inception as a federal/state vocational rehabilitation program with the 1986 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act (P.L. 99-506), supported employment has afforded an increasing number of individuals with severe disabilities, previously believed to be unemployable, an opportunity to enter and compete in our nation's work force. The national number of persons participating in supported employment programs has risen from 90,000 in 1991 to 140,000 in 1995 (Wehman, Revell, & Kregel, 1997). Traditionally, the "job coach model" of supported employment (e.g., Wehman & Kregel, 1985; Rusch, 1986) was the primary means through which individuals with significant disabilities were able to participate and succeed in competitive employment.

In the Job Coach model, a job coach or employment specialist was the individual primarily responsible for providing consumer assessment, job development, job placement, job-site training, and on-going follow along services to the individual for the duration of his or her employment. A distinguishing characteristic of the job coach model is that the employment specialist provided individualized assistance to the person with a disability during each of these components of supported employment. In providing individualized assistance within the employment setting, the employment specialist did whatever was necessary to train the individual as efficiently and effectively as possible to perform the required job duties. Oftentimes, this meant relying on the assistance and expertise of workplace personnel, as well as physical and auditory cues existing in the work environment to provide support to the employee.

The idea of using supports which exist within the employment setting to assist individuals with disabilities in participating in community-based employment settings predates the introduction of the concept of natural supports in professional literature (Nisbet & Hagner, 1988). Several rehabilitation professionals alluded to the idea of using coworkers or employer supports to provide assistance to a person with a disability in order for an individual to consistently and successfully perform the required duties of his or her job (e.g., Rusch & Menchetti, 1981; Shafer, 1986; Wehman, 1981). Additionally, early supported employment job coach training manuals proposed the idea of utilizing coworkers and supervisors to provide training or ongoing assistance to an individual (e.g., Moon, Goodall, Barcus, & Brooke, 1986).

In the job coach model of supported employment, one of the primary roles of the employment specialist is to train the individual to perform the job and then systematically fade his or her presence from the job-site after the individual has learned to do the job. When the idea of using natural supports initially emerged, it was presented as an independent alternative to the traditional job-coach model of supported employment. The

rationales provided for advancing the use of natural supports were to improve the integration and employment retention of individuals with disabilities in competitive employment (Nisbet & Hagner, 1988). As the concept of using natural supports evolved and natural support strategies were implemented, other rehabilitation professionals also purported that the presence of an employment specialist might actual impede the social integration of persons with disabilities in the employment environment (i.e., Fabian & Luecking, 1991; Hagner, 1992; Hagner, Rogan & Murphy, 1992). In efforts to remedy this situation, many professionals viewed natural support strategies as a viable alternative to the more "traditional" job coach model of supported employment.

Even though a lack of consensus exists in the field regarding the definition of natural supports and what is or is not a natural support, it is evident that natural supports are being widely utilized. The concept of natural supports has assisted in fostering a variety of strategies to provide support to a person with a disability (e.g., Butterworth, Whitney-Thomas, & Shaw, 1997; DiLeo, Leucking & Hathaway, 1995; Fabian, Edelman, & Leedy, 1993; Hagner, Butterworth & Keith, 1995; Parent, Unger, Gibson, & Clements, 1994). With the development and implementation of these natural support strategies, it is unclear as to what the role of the employment specialist should be in assisting an individual with a significant disability in obtaining and ultimately succeeding in the work environments of his or her choice. Further, if natural supports are being utilized, then what is the type of natural supports provided and who is providing it?

Empirical evidence which documents the use and effectiveness of natural supports has only recently begun to emerge and is extremely limited in scope. For example, in a recent national study of supported employment providers, more than 85% of the provider agencies indicated that they utilize natural supports during the delivery of supported employment services (West, Kregel, Hernandez, & Hock, 1997). Results from the same study indicated that natural supports were predominately used during the job-site training and extended services component of supported employment.

Mank and colleagues (1996a; 1996b) investigated the degree of typical employment features and natural supports experienced by supported employment participants in comparison to coworkers and the effect which is had on employment outcomes such as wages, benefits, length of employment, and integration. Overall, the research indicated that the more typical the employment of individuals with disabilities the more likely they are to realize better wage and social integration outcomes.

Professional literature suggests that the role of the employment specialist when using a natural supports approach is to serve as a consultant or facilitator to the employer by building on supports which exist in the workplace, as well as the expertise of the employer (Fabian & Lucking, 1991; Fabian, et al, 1993; Hagner, Rogan, & Murphy, 1992; Rogan, Hagner, & Murphy, 1993). However, empirical evidence which describes the role of the employment specialist when natural supports are utilized is lacking.

In a recent study, Butterworth and colleagues (1997) describe specific strategies used by employment training specialists (ETS) to facilitate natural supports and social integration at the work-site. They reported that the role of the ETS shifts from one of providing direct instruction to the employee with disabilities to facilitating problem solving and consultation with the employee, coworkers, and supervisor. Their research also reported positive correlations between the level of ETS investment in facilitating natural supports and the level of workplace supports and inclusion for the young adults placed into competitive employment.

While it is clear that there is more than a passing interest in the use of natural supports to provide assistance to a person with a disability,

evidence is clearly limited which describes the types of support provided by the employment specialist or other non-traditional support resources, such as family members, friends, coworkers, teachers and volunteers when a natural supports approach to supported employment is implemented. The purpose of this manuscript is to describe supports needed or desired by supported employment participants, the type of supports utilized, and the role of the employment specialist in addressing support needs when a natural support strategy is implemented.

METHOD

Since 1992, the Natural Supports Demonstration Project at Virginia Commonwealth University's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment has developed and implemented a natural supports approach for achieving competitive employment outcomes for transition age youth with significant disabilities. The seven-step Community and Workplace model (Parent, Unger, Gibson, & Clements, 1994) which incorporates the use of natural supports, individual choice and self-determination into the existing supported employment service delivery system was implemented with all persons placed into supported competitive employment by project employment specialists. Individuals were referred to the project by parents, rehabilitation counselors, and special education teachers. Participants were representative of a variety of disability labels and resided in rural, urban and suburban geographical areas which surround a Southeastern metropolitan city.

Community and Workplace Support Model

The Community and Workplace Support Model (Table 1) relies on the assistance of individuals or other support mechanisms (e.g., assistive technology, compensatory strategies, job modifications, personal assistant services, etc.) to assist an individual with participating in the community and work environments of his or her choice (Parent, et al., 1994). Potential supports are not limited to agencies, organizations and persons who provide services for persons with disabilities. Instead, all agencies and organizations located in one's community which provide services and assistance to the general population are investigated to determine what type of support they might potentially offer and how individuals can access their services. Examples of these organizations and the type of support offered include: the local office of the state employment commission for assistance in identifying job openings, determining job skills and interests, and developing a resume; the adult literacy council for assistance in completing employment applications and developing a resume; and volunteers from local schools, colleges, and universities to provide assistance with getting individuals ready for work and providing transportation.

Table 1

Community and Workplace Support Model

1. Determine individuals needs and preferences
2. Brainstorm potential options
3. Assess job and community supports
4. Identify individual choices
5. Develop strategies for accessing supports
6. Evaluate support effectiveness
7. Arrange provision for on-going monitoring

The Community and Workplace Support Model and the Job Coach Model

The Community and Workplace Support model is not intended to be an alternative approach to the job-coach model (see Wehman & Kregel, 1985) of providing supported employment services. Instead, the support model is infused into all aspects of services delivery and should be implemented for every support need which arises during the supported employment service delivery process. For example, individuals may require assistance in determining what types of jobs or careers they wish to pursue, finding a job, arranging transportation, managing their money, addressing concerns regarding social security benefits, and securing necessary attire for work. Using the Community and Workplace Support approach, the employment specialist works with the individual and significant persons in his or her life, to determine support needs and preferences; brainstorm potential options; assess job and community supports; identify individual choices; develop strategies for accessing supports; evaluate effectiveness of support; and arrange provisions for ongoing monitoring for every support need identified during the supported employment process.

What is a Support Need?

Individual support needs are considered to be any type of assistance required or desired by an individual which aids or facilitates participation in the community and workplace environments of his or her choice. Support needs may be identified by the individual, significant persons in his or her life, employers, or coworkers. The employment specialist may respond to an individual's support need by (1) identifying potential sources of support or assistance, (2) arranging for the support selected by the individual to be provided or (3) providing the support him or her self. For example, an individual who required transportation to and from work, was able to choose from having a coworker transport him, having his job coach train him to take the bus or taxi, and walk. In some instances, the employment specialist assisted in arranging for the individual to use or access the support such as the taxi or the bus. In other instances, the employer arranged for a coworker to transport the individual and the employment specialist was not involved in arranging the support. The level and extent to which the employment specialist is involved in arranging and providing support will be contingent on the desires of the individual and the identification of support resources. The employment specialist is always available to assist should the need arise. However, the focus of the Community and Workplace Support Model is on identifying and utilizing supports which exist in the individual's life, community, and employment setting to provide assistance to a person with a disability based on the individual's preferences.

By incorporating the use of the Community and Workplace Support Model into supported employment service delivery, a variety of support options were identified and developed to address each individual's specific support needs. For example: an individual who needed assistance in knowing when to take breaks and when to return to work was able to chose from (1) a coworker or supervisor prompting him, (2) wearing a watch with multiple alarms which was preprogrammed to "beep" at the times when he needed to break and then return to work, or (3) taking breaks according to the natural cues in the work environment, such as when he had completed specific tasks or when coworkers were taking their meals. Similarly, an individual needing assistance in getting up and ready for work was able to chose from (1) setting two alarm clocks, (2) having a member of the residential staff wake him up, (3) having his neighbor knock on the door, or (4) having a friend or employment specialist call him in the morning.

Best Practices in Supported Employment

The Community and Workplace Support Model incorporates the "best practices" of

supported employment as advanced by Brooke and colleagues (1997) including: consumer control of the employment process; opportunities for the consumer to make informed choices; early identification of long term supports; emphasis on the use of community and business supports; and utilization of a person-centered planning approach. The Community and Workplace Support model provides individuals with disabilities opportunities to make informed choices regarding: the type of jobs or careers they might like to pursue; the type and level of assistance they would like to receive; how to learn how to perform the job; and how and when to advance in their career. For instance, individuals can select who they want to assist them to find a job, remember how to do the job, request time off from work, and address any other support needs that arise. Parent, Unger, Gibson, and Clements (1994) have described the specific natural support strategies utilized in the Community and Workplace support model in greater detail.

Sample

Consumer Characteristics

Table 2 on the following page contains demographic characteristics of individuals placed into competitive employment by the VCU-RRTC Natural Supports Transition Project staff from June of 1992 to November of 1996, utilizing the community and workplace support model. The thirty-six individuals served by project staff represented a heterogenous group of individuals across gender, race, and primary disability label. Even though individuals with a primary disability of mental retardation represented almost half (47%) of the persons placed through the activities of the projects, 47% of these individuals also had a secondary disability. In addition to serving young adults with traumatic brain injury and young adults with mental illness, individuals with disability labels of autism, cerebral palsy, learning disability or spina bifida comprise the individuals included in the "other" category. The mean age of participants at the time of referral was 23 years old. Information on individual's race, and the percentage of individuals previously employed competitively is also contained in Table 2.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using the Community and Workplace Support form developed by the VCU-RRTC Natural Supports Project staff. The initial draft of the form was developed with assistance from the projects' advisory committee which consisted of individuals with disabilities, parents, rehabilitation counselors, educators, employment specialists, advocates, employers and community representatives. It was field tested with participants in the pilot study of the Natural Supports Demonstration Project for the purpose of insuring the form's clarity and the potential for capturing necessary information. During the field test, feedback was obtained from employment specialists administering the form, individuals with disabilities and family members, regarding the clarity of the instrument. Based on their input, the instrument was modified and then reviewed by the projects' advisory committee and rehabilitation professionals familiar with natural support strategies.

Content of the Community and Workplace Form

The final version of the nine page Community and Workplace Support Form consists of several forced choice type questions (see table 3 on the following page). The purpose of the form is to identify the type of support needed or desired by an individual, the supports which were utilized by the individual in meeting his or her support needs, and the type of assistance provided by the employment specialist in addressing the individual's support needs.

Unit of Analysis

Support needs can be defined as any type of assistance required or desired by an individual

Table 2

Participant Demographic Characteristics (n = 36)

		Frequency	Percentage
Mean Age = 23.27 years (range: 20 to 38 years)			
Gender:	Male	23	64%
	Woman	13	36%
Race:	Asian	1	3%
	Black	9	25%
	Hispanic	1	3%
	Caucasian	25	69%
Primary Disability Label:			
	Mental Retardation	17	47%
	Traumatic Brain Injury	6	17%
	Mental Illness	9	25%
	Other	4	11%
Percentage Previously Competitively Employed:			
	Mental Retardation	23%	
	Traumatic Brain Injury	50%	
	Mental Illness	78%	
	Other	75%	

Table 3

Community and Workplace Support Form Questions

What type of support is needed or desired?
What support resources have been identified to address this need?
What type of support option has been selected?
Who has primary responsibility for arranging or accessing the support?
Who is the primary person responsible for providing the support?
What has been the role of the employment specialist in addressing this support need?
Are any costs associated with providing the support?
Who is primarily responsible for overseeing the on-going monitoring of the support?

which aids or facilitates participation in community and employment environments. Learning how to do the job, obtaining transportation to and from work, remembering how to complete all required job duties, socializing with coworkers, addressing Social Security issues, and picking up and cashing a paycheck are all examples of support needs. They are identified any time assistance might be needed or when obstacles are encountered which may impede or limit participation in these environments. Support needs may be identified by the employment specialist or communicated to the employment specialist by the individual or anyone involved in his or her life, such as one's family members or friends, employer or coworkers, and/or teacher.

Procedures

The Community and Workplace Support Form was completed by an employment specialist every time a support need was identified for an individual throughout the supported employment process. The employment specialists were trained by the director of the Natural Supports Project in data collection and various monitoring devices were implemented to insure accuracy and timeliness of form completion. During the training period, employment specialists were trained to an average interrater agreement of .90. Data were also collected on demographic and historical information for individual and employment outcomes, such as wages earned, hours worked, and job retention using forms previously developed by the RRTC for the Supported Employment Information System (SEIS)(Kregel, Wehman, Revell, & Hill, 1990). All data were reviewed for completeness and congruence with previously entered data and the project data management specialist reconciled discrepancies through direct contact with the employment specialist who completed the instrument. Statistical Analysis System Software (SAS Institute, 1986) was used for data analysis.

RESULTS

Employment Characteristics

Overall, 36 individuals with severe disabilities were placed in a total of 54 different jobs. The fifty-four different job placements is representative of an individual who held two or more job, simultaneously (n=1); individuals who chose to resign from their first job to pursue career advancement opportunities or employment in a different occupational environment (n=7); and individuals who resigned or were terminated from their job (n=10). Mean number of job placements, cumulative mean hourly wage per placement, cumulative mean hours worked per week, and employment retention information were calculated for participants grouped by primary disability label (See Table 4 on the following page). Individuals with traumatic brain injury as a primary disability label earned slightly more per hour ($5.44) and worked a greater number of hours per work (25.1) in comparison to participants with mental retardation ($4.81;20.66 hours), mental illness ($5.02;23.4 hours) and individuals with other disability labels ($4.66; 23.7 hours).

The employment retention ratio was calculated using the procedure developed by Wehman and colleagues (1989) as a measure of vocational progress and length of time an individual was employed. The ratio is determined by dividing the number of months an individual was employed, (beginning at the date of first job placement and continuing either to the current date or the date of discharge from the project, regardless of the number of job placements) by the total possible months that he or she would have had an opportunity to be employed. The mean employment retention ratio for each disability category were reported to vary from a low of.73 (young adults comprising the "other" category) to a high of .87 (young adults with mental retardation) among the four categories of disability. The group mean

Table 4

Employment Information

Primary Disability Label	Mean Number of Job Placements	Cumulative Mean Hourly Wage Per Placement	Cumulative Mean hours worked Per Week	Retention (range .17 to 1)
Mental Retardation (n = 17)	1.29 (n = 22)	$4.81	20.66	.87
Traumatic Brain Injury (n = 6)	1.67 (n = 10)	$5.44	25.1	.82
Mental Illness (n = 9)	1.78 (n = 16)	$5.02	23.4	.77
Other (n = 4)	1.5 (n = 6)	$4.66	23.67	.73
TOTAL (n = 36)	1.5	$4.98	23.1	.82

of .82 indicates that during the total possible time individuals could have been employed beginning with their first job placement, they were gainfully employed 82% of the total time until either the current date or the date of discharge from the project (See table 4).

Type of Supports Needed or Desired by Individuals

Support needs can be defined as any type of assistance required or desired by an individual which aids or facilitates participation in community and employment environments. Learning how to do the job, transportation to and from work, signing in and out of work, remembering how to complete all required job duties, getting along with coworkers and picking up and cashing a paycheck are all examples of support needs. A support need can be identified at any time during the supported employment process. For the 36 individuals placed into competitive employment by the VCU-RRTC Natural Supports Project, a total of 57 different support needs were identified. Additionally, individuals often expressed a need for a number of the 57 different support needs more than once, as the total number of supports needed or desired were reported to be 590 during the span of 40 months. For example, an individual who was presently employed expressed a need to work at a different job but was unsure of what other types of employment he would like to pursue or how he might go about finding a different job. Upon referral to the project, one of the initial support needs he identified was finding a job. Once this support need was satisfied by securing a job and working for an extended period of time, he decided he wanted to make a career change and pursue a different type of job. Needing assistance with this, his "new" support needs were identifying what type of job he might like to have and then once determined, securing that job.

Additionally, individual support needs oftentimes may have arisen more than once because the type of support provided or the person

providing the support was no longer available to provide support, such as the need for transportation when a coworker who provided transportation was no longer going to be employed at the same business location. Other instances in which a support need might arise again include situations which: (1) the support might be too costly; or (2) the support was not successful; or (3) the support did not meet the needs of the individual.

Each of the 57 different support needs as designated on the Community and Workplace Support Form were assigned into one of six categories: 1) finding a job; 2) learning how to do the job; 3) assistance with completing the job; 4) addressing work-related issues; 5) addressing nonwork-related issues; and 6) transportation. Descriptions of the specific types of support needs defined under the six category headings, as well as group frequencies can be found in Table 5 on the following page. As the data contained in the table reflects, the most prevalent support needs of young adults were in the area of addressing work-related issues (28%). Examples of support needs which were encompassed by this category include: an individual with a traumatic brain injury who required assistance with getting from the entrance of a large discount retail store to his work station in the stock and receiving area in the back of the store each time he reported to work; or an individual who worked in a fast food franchise needed assistance with alternations for her uniform.

Addressing nonwork-related issues (23%), finding a job (17%), and learning how to do the job (15%) ranked second, third, and fourth, respectively in the types of support or assistance needed or desired by individuals. Assistance with addressing nonwork-related issues included such needs as addressing social security concerns, locating a place to live, managing one's finances, meeting people outside of work, and furthering one's education and/or training. In finding a job, individuals often indicated a need for assistance in determining what type of job they would like to have, or what working in specific jobs or businesses would involve, as well as securing employment. Assistance with learning how to do one's job, and assistance with completing the job, represented less than one-fourth of the total support needs indicated by participants. In contrast, over one-half (51%) of the support needs reported by young adults with severe disabilities were in the areas of addressing work-related and nonwork related issues.

Identifying and Arranging Sources of Support

Even though a support might "naturally" occur in an employment or community setting or be readily available, it did not necessarily mean that the individual could access the support. For example, in arranging the support, an employment specialist, parent or family member, friend or other designated individuals assist the young adult with a disability in locating and securing the desired support in order for the individual to receive assistance. The persons responsible for arranging the support assists the individual with a disability in choosing among different types of supports as well as evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of each type of support. The person does not necessarily provide the support, but instead insures that the individual with a disability can access the support if it is needed.

The data indicate that when an individual's support need falls in the area of addressing work-related issues, finding a job, or assistance with completing the job, the employment specialist has the primary responsibility for arranging the support (See table 6). For instance, an employment specialist might arrange to have a teacher, parent or family member obtain employment applications at businesses of interest to the individual or perhaps a teacher, parent or family member can drop off an individual's resume, which was prepared by a volunteer from the Local Adult Literacy Council.

Table 5

Types of Support Needs (n = 590)

Consumer Support Needs	Frequency	Percentage
Finding a Job: Support needed which assists individuals in determining job choices, developing a resume, finding a job, and/or finding a different or second job	102	17%
Learning How to Do the Job: Support needed which assists individuals with learning how to do the job, remembering how to do the job, and becoming oriented around the workplace	90	15%
Assistance with Completing the Job: Support needed to assist individuals in completing all the required job duties within the time allotted on a daily basis.	32	5%
Addressing Work-Related Issues: Support needed to address issues which might arise at the employment setting or circumstances in which the absence of support might adversely affect one's employment situation. Examples include: getting up and ready for work; addressing fatigue or stamina issues on the job; getting along with coworkers; arranging work-schedule and hours; signing in and out for work; calling in sick or late for work; and changing something about the job; and managing challenging behaviors at the work-site.	168	28%
Addressing Nonwork-Related Issues: Support needed away from the job-site such as developing friendships, meeting people outside of work, pursuing recreational opportunities, locating a place to live, using money and making purchases, handling Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) issues, and taking care of personal hygiene and grooming issues	137	23%
Arranging Transportation: Support needed to assist individuals in finding transportation to and from work, obtaining a learners permit or driver's license, accessing and learning how to use public transportation, accessing specialized transportation, and making ride arrangements with coworkers, volunteers, and friends or family members	61	10%

The data indicates that individuals relied heavily on the employment specialist to arrange supports for many types of support needs (See table 6 on the following page). However, for non-work related issues, a number of the individuals preferred to arrange the support on their own (23.1%) or have a parent or family member arrange supports (39.9%). Additionally, workplace personnel were most frequently cited by individuals as having the responsibility for arranging supports in learning how to do the job. Thus, when arranging support needs which involved locating a place to live, picking up and cashing a paycheck, participating in social and recreational functions, or handling legal issues, individuals clearly desired to have a family member or someone close to them arrange the support. In contrast, when learning how to do the job, the individuals preferred to have coworkers or supervisors arrange the support required.

Oftentimes, the support option selected required a systematic strategy for implementation with someone primarily responsible for arranging the support and linking the individual with a disability up with the support provider or support strategy. For example, when addressing work-related issues, such as managing challenging behaviors, or signing in and out of work, the employment specialist would work collaboratively with the individual and employer to identify potential support options within the workplace. After supports were identified, the individual would then be presented with a variety of options to chose from. Once the support was selected, and agreed upon by all parties involved, the employment specialist would then arrange for the support to be provided.

If, in the instance of managing challenging behaviors, the support chosen was for the individual was to approach an identified coworker to discuss things which were bothering him, then the employment specialist might arrange with the employer and the individual for this to occur. If the support agreed upon for signing in and out of work was to have a coworker "punch" the individual's time card, the employment specialist was oftentimes the person responsible for facilitating this support by identifying coworkers and developing a backup plan for these types of work related supports. In all instances, the employment specialist's role was not necessarily to provide the support (punch in for the individual), but instead to arrange the support so that the individual could systematically access supports which were both desirable and feasible for all persons involved.

Support Providers

Supervisor and Other Workplace Personnel

If one of the roles of the employment specialist was linking the individual to the support or to the support provider then who were the individuals actually providing the support? Once an individual is employed, assistance is predominantly provided by supervisors and other workplace personnel. As illustrated in Table 7 on the following page, supervisors and coworkers were actively involved when the individual required support in learning how to do one's job (76%), or complete the duties required of the position (51%), and, to a lesser extent when support was needed in addressing work-related issues (34%).

Employment Specialist

The employment specialist was rarely designated as the primary provider of support when an individual's need was identified as learning how to do the job, assistance with completing the job, or addressing work-related issues. Further, in looking only at job site training, the employment specialist was designated as the primary means of support in only 8% of the instances when support was required for learning how to do the job. In contrast, the employment specialist was primarily responsible for providing support when assistance was needed in finding a job. The data indicates that employment specialists are relied on to a

Table 6
Identifying and Arranging Supports (n = 590)

	Consumer	Parent/Family Member	Employment Specialist	Other Human Services Personnel/Teacher	Workplace Personnel
Finding a Job n = (116)	34 (29.3%)	9 (7.8%)	67 (57.8%)	6 (5.2%)	0 (0%)
Leaning How to do the Job n = (66)	7 (10.6%)	0 (0%)	26 (39.4%)	3 (4.5%)	30 (45.5%)
Assistance with Completing the Job n = (57)	12 (21.1%)	0 (0%)	28 (49.1%)	0 (0%)	17 (29.8%)
Addressing Work-Related Issues n = (160)	60 (37.5%)	13 (8.1%)	73 (45.6%)	1 (.6%)	13 (8.1%)
Arranging Transportation n = (58)	24 (41.4%)	21 (36.2%)	11 (19.0%)	2 (3.4%)	0 (0%)

Table 7
Support Providers (n = 590)

Type of Support Needed	Consumer	Supervisor	Other Workplace Personnel	Parent/Family Member/ Friend/ Neighbor	School Personnel, Other Human Services Personnel, Volunteers	Employment Specialist
Finding a Job n = 113	29 (25.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (.9%)	12 (10.6%)	13 (11.5%)	58 (51.3%)
Leaning How to do the Job n = 66	4 (6.1%)	26 (39.4%)	24 (36.4%)	0 (0%)	3 (2.7%)	9 (8.0%)
Assistance with Completing the Job n = 51	16 (31.4%)	13 (25.5%)	13 (25.5%)	0 (0%)	9 (0%)	9 (17.6%)
Addressing Work-Related Issues n = 150	49 (32.7%)	40 (26.7%)	11 (7.3%)	30 (20.0%)	7 (4.7%)	13 (8.7%)
Address Nonwork-Related Issues n = 141	24 (17.0%)	6 (4.3%)	5 (3.5%)	57 (40.4%)	39 (27.7%)	10 (7.1%)
Arranging Transportation n = 56	16 (28.6%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.6%)	23 (41.1%)	11 (19.6%)	4 (7.1%)

greater extent than other support persons in the identification and securement of employment for persons with disabilities. Minimal support was provided by family members, friends, school personnel, or other human services personnel in determining employment choices and locating job opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Individual Support

In some instances, the individual was responsible for providing his or her own support in locating employment and identifying job choices. For example, individuals were provided with instructions on how to identify "help wanted" signs in businesses which they frequented as well as pick up employment applications and drop off their resume with the employment specialist's business card attached to it at prospective employers. Other situations where the individual provided his or her own support in finding a job, include reviewing the classifieds with the assistance of a family member or friend and then calling the employment specialist to let him or her know of an interest in certain positions.

Family Members and Friends

In the area of addressing work-related issues, family members, friends and neighbors were also a primary means of support to young adults with disabilities. For example, an individual working in a hot environment desired to take periodic water breaks. The individual's family member worked with workplace personnel to insure that it was all right for the individual to take short breaks at designated times throughout the day. The individual, after completing a certain amount of this job tasks, would take the breaks if he felt he needed to with no assistance from coworkers or supervisors.

Individuals also preferred to have someone close to them, such as a parent, family member or friend, to provide support in addressing non-work related issues such as managing money and paying bills, meeting people outside of work and monitoring medical issues. In approximately 40% of the instances in which addressing nonwork-related issues were cited as a support need, parents, family members, friends or neighbors were utilized as primary support providers.

Role of Employment Specialists in Utilizing a Natural Supports Strategy During Supported Employment

Table 8 on the following page indicates the specific type of assistance provided by employment specialists implementing the Community and Workplace Support Model to young adults with significant disabilities. In less than 25% of the instances when support was needed, the employment specialist's role was to directly provide the support. If employment specialists were not providing direct support to individuals, then what role did employment specialists play in ensuring that individuals were successful in their jobs and that both the individual and the employer were satisfied with the employment relationship?

In addition to providing support, these data indicate that employment specialists engage in a variety of activities when a natural supports strategy is implemented. For approximately three-fourths of the 590 support needs identified for individuals, the employment specialist was responsible for identifying support options (72%). Identifying support options involved the employment specialist working with the individual, his or her family, friends, employer, and other significant persons in his or her life to determine potential sources of assistance or support.

Additionally, in more than one-half of the 590 total support needs, the employment specialist provided additional support to individuals if needed (52%), and shared information with individuals and the employer (50%). Examples of these types of assistance include: an employment specialist stepping in to provide job-site training because the coworker was pulled away when a fellow employee

called in sick; the employment specialist making recommendations to a coworker providing the training who had difficulty increasing the individual's work speed; the employment specialist negotiating with the employer because the individual wanted to work different hours so she could spend time with her family on weekends; and an employment specialist suggesting that the employer purchase a plastic container which was divided into sections so the employee could keep all of her condiments separate and which would expedite her restocking all condiment stations at a restaurant.

Table 8
Role of the Employment Specialist

Role of Employment Specialist	Frequency/ Percentage of Response
1. Identify support options	422 (71.5%)
2. Provide additional support if needed	309 (52.4%)
3. Share information/resources	296 (50.2%)
4. Advocating	
5. Assist consumer with choosing type of support	274 (46.4%)
6. Help consumer access the support	210 (25.6%)
7. Contact support resources	207 (35.1%)
8. Work with consumer and support provider	186 (31.5%)
9. On-going monitoring of support	136 (23.1%)
10. Providing the support	132 (22.4%)
11. Oversee the support arrangement	115 (19.5%)
12. Train the person providing the support	83 (14.1%)
13. Making support arrangements	30 (5.1%)
14. Employment specialist not involved	19 (3.2%)
15. Making alternative arrangements	17 (2.9%)
16. Other	2 (0.3%)

* Respondents could check more than one type of assistance

DISCUSSION

This paper presents the results of the first empirical study which catalogs the kinds of activities employment specialists engage in when a supported employment program emphasizes the use of community and workplace supports during supported employment service delivery. Additionally, a description of the support needs, as well as individuals who arranged and provided supports to young adults with severe disabilities receiving supported employment services is provided.

Due to the uniqueness of the Community and Workplace Support Model, as well as the variety of natural support strategies which exist in the field of supported employment these findings may have limited generalizability. Though the results are limited to one supported employment program which utilized the Community and Workplace Support Model for an extended time period, several interesting findings regarding the role of employment specialists, and other support providers are revealed.

Young Adults Have a Variety of Support Needs

The results of this study have demonstrated that young adults with significant disabilities have a variety of support needs in obtaining and maintaining employment. These data indicate that individuals' support needs are not limited to finding a job and learning how to do the job but additionally, individuals have numerous support needs which arise during all phases of supported employment. Individuals have multiple support needs after they become employed, such as learning how to do the job, addressing work-related and non-work related issues, and arranging transportation.

When are Natural Supports Utilized?

The data also emphasizes the employment specialists' efforts to utilize natural supports during

all phases of the supported employment process. This is especially encouraging in light of the results of the national research study conducted by West and colleagues (1997). In a study of 385 supported employment programs nationwide, they found that supported employment providers predominately utilize natural supports when teaching the person to do the job and during the provision of ongoing monitoring and support for their consumers. The use of natural supports during consumer assessment, job development and job placement activities is reported far less frequently.

These data imply that the employment specialist may need to devote additional time in the beginning of the supported employment process in order to get to know the individual, assess the individual's abilities, and identify potential sources of support in the individual's life and community, prior to job development. Because employment specialists are most often relied on to identify and arrange supports or assistance, knowledge of the specific types of community and work place supports available to any citizen or employee is critical. Employment specialists must be able to assess individual's needs and then communicate and negotiate with prospective support providers for the purpose of securing the type and level of support needed or desired.

Who Provides Support?

The findings reported above verify that a number of persons provide support to individuals in obtaining and maintaining employment, including: family members, neighbors, friends, school personnel, employment specialists, supervisors and other workplace personnel. The data provides evidence that when young adults are able to choose the type of support they would like to have they predominantly select the employment specialist to assist them in finding a job and to considerably lesser extent providing assistance with completing the job and learning how to do the job. Even though employment specialists are arranging supports to assist individuals in finding jobs, the data also demonstrates that employment specialists provide the most direct assistance to individuals during job development when a natural supports strategy is implemented. One possible explanation for this is that young adults want certain types of jobs or request to work in certain types of businesses. Oftentimes, positions and jobs within these highly specialized or popular businesses have to be negotiated. Natural support providers, such as parents or family members, are often apprehensive or feel it is inappropriate to approach a prospective employer.

In all other support need categories the predominate providers of support are supervisors or workplace personnel, family members, friends, or the individual. Parents, family members, neighbors, and friends are often relied on to arrange transportation and address nonwork-related issues. Supervisors and other workplace personnel are the primary providers of support in learning how to do the job, providing assistance with completing the job and addressing work-related issues.

The fact that employment specialist are not directly responsible for teaching the person the job or providing transportation does not mean that employment specialists have an abundant amount of time on their hands and that they can serve more people on their caseloads. Employment specialists may still be devoting the same amount of time in working with individuals to secure and maintain employment, but the type of assistance they are providing has evolved from always being the primary provider of support to that of identifying, facilitating, and ensuring that supports which are selected by the individual are meeting his or her needs.

Role of the Employment Specialist

In addressing the variety of support needs of young adults, and the providers of support, the data reflects the idea that the role of the employment specialist evolves from that of being the primary

provider of services to that of a facilitator of services in arranging supports for individuals to access. In almost three-fourths of the total support needs, one of the primary roles of the employment specialist was to identify potential support options. Additionally, in over one-half of the support needs, the role of the employment specialist was to share information and resources. The results of this study have demonstrated that employment specialists must not only be knowledgeable about a variety of support options available both in the work setting and in the community, but also be able to develop and secure the desired support which can assist young adults with significant disabilities in maximizing their full career potential. The data implies that employment specialist must function more in a consultant role as they work collaboratively with employers, family, friends, community members, and educators to capitalize on existing supports in addition to creatively developing supports which meet each individual's unique needs.

The data indicates that in less than one-fourth of the total support needs of individuals the employment specialist's role was to provide the support. However, this does not mean that the employment specialist was not involved in arranging, facilitating or overseeing the support arrangement. The second most cited role of the employment specialist was that of providing additional support if needed. These results imply that even though the employment specialist may not be the person providing the support, it does not necessarily relieve the employment specialist from the responsibilities that the "natural support" is providing or free the employment specialist to complete other activities. It is only after all parties are satisfied and the employment specialist has evaluated whether the support is serving its intended purposes, that the employment specialist can begin to focus on different activities.

SUMMARY

The use of natural supports is pervasive in supported employment. However, not much is known about what an employment specialist does when natural supports are used. The results of this study provide an initial description of the role of employment specialists and other support providers when a supported employment program emphasizes the use of community and workplace supports during supported employment. As noted by Test and Wood (1996) there is a need for much more natural support research. They explain:

> *"Because there is so little experimental research designed to determine functional variables within supported employment as a whole, it is not surprising that none exist within the area of natural supports strategies. Unfortunately, the lack of this type of research leaves supported employment vulnerable to anyone who calls what he or she is doing "supported employment". In other words, if someone says he or she is doing supported employment, then it must be supported employment. This same situation can be applied to natural supports strategies. Additional research on natural supports strategies and related outcomes is clearly needed..."*
> p. 170.

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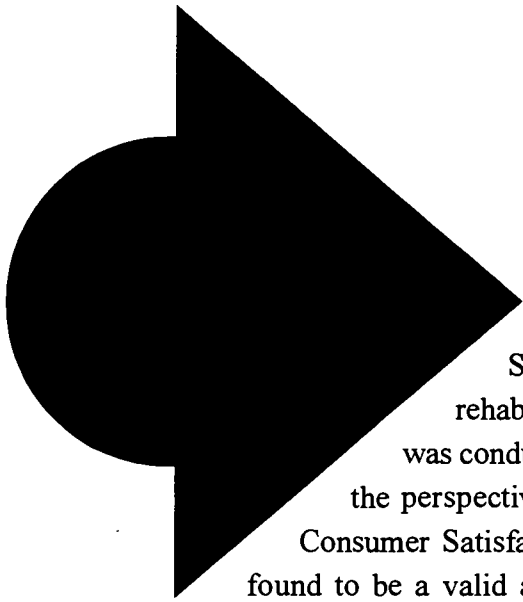

Abstract

Supported employment has been demonstrated to be a successful rehabilitation model for individuals with severe disabilities. This study was conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of this employment model from the perspective of the individuals with severe disabilities whom it serves. A Consumer Satisfaction Survey, developed by individuals with disabilities and found to be a valid and reliable instrument, was administered to 110 persons with disabilities in Virginia through face-to-face interviews. The results indicate that the majority of consumers like their jobs. Most are happy with supported employment services and would use them again if they lost their job or decided to change jobs. Close to half of the consumers would like to change some aspect of their job to make it better and more than half feel their current job is not the career they would have permanently. The findings suggest the need to increase consumer involvement in all phases of supported employment service delivery. Strategies to insure consumer choice and respond to desires to change parts of their job or pursue career advancement opportunities are discussed.

CONSUMER SATISFACTION: A SURVEY OF INDIVIDUALS WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES WHO RECEIVE SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

By: Wendy Parent, John Kregel, & Angela Johnson

Supported employment has been the vehicle through which individuals with severe disabilities have demonstrated their ability to acquire and maintain meaningful employment. Traditionally, individuals with severe disabilities had limited vocational options from which to choose and were restricted from working with persons without disabilities. Supported employment emerged to give persons with disabilities an opportunity to access employment options that had previously been unavailable to them. Through supported employment, individuals with severe disabilities are able to work in real businesses in the community with persons without disabilities, earn competitive wages, and receive individualized, ongoing support services to help them successfully maintain their employment.

Supported employment has proven to be a viable employment option for persons with severe disabilities (Rusch, 1990; Wehman, Sale, & Parent, 1992). Its growth and impact in the last decade have been phenomenal. From 1986 through 1993, the number of participants expanded from 10,000 to more than 105,000 persons with severe disabilities (Wehman & Revell, 1996). Today, it is estimated that more than 120,000 persons with severe disabilities have selected supported employment as their preferred employment option (Rehabilitation Research & Training Center on Supported Employment, 1996). Average earnings are reported to be $4.53 an hour, with the number of hours individuals are working averaging 22.5 per week.

Through supported employment, individuals with disabilities are repeatedly demonstrating their ability to be positive contributors to their work environment. Numerous studies have documented the success of supported employment in helping individuals with disabilities to achieve wages, work hours, and fringe benefits similar to those of their nondisabled coworkers (Revell, Wehman, Kregel, West, Rayfield, 1994; Rusch, 1990). Mank, O'Neill, & Jensen (1996) reported that 55 individuals with developmental disabilities working in King County government in Seattle, Washington earned an average of nearly $1200 per month, worked more than 30 hours a week, and received full benefits.

In order for persons with disabilities to continually achieve success in supported employment, supported employment programs are increasingly emphasizing consumer choice as the driving force behind their service delivery. Ironically, supported employment programs often overlook consumers when evaluating how effectively supported employment is meeting their needs. In addition, many of the instruments available for assessing consumer satisfaction are not targeted for individuals with severe disabilities and may not offer a meaningful mechanism for capturing the true opinions of those individuals participating in supported employment. A tremendous source of program evaluation feedback is lost when consumers are not given an opportunity to evaluate the services that they receive (Kregel,

1992; Wehman & Kregel, 1996). Supported employment cannot continue to meet the needs of persons with severe disabilities without relying on its consumers for feedback on whether the program is successfully fulfilling its mission.

Research studies on supported employment have also underutilized consumer feedback when measuring the success of supported employment. Most studies aimed at assessing the success and quality of supported employment have compared outcomes such as wages earned (Kregel, Wehman, Revell, & Hill, 1990; Wehman, Kregel, & Shafer, 1989), hours worked (Kregel et al., 1990; Shafer, Revell, & Isbister, 1991; Wehman et al., 1989), benefits received (Kregel et al., 1990; Wehman et al., 1989), physical and social integration (Parent, Kregel, Metzler, &Twardzik, 1992), and long-term employment retention (Lagomarcino, 1990). Research has tended to not rely on supported employment participants for feedback, because it was often thought to be too challenging to measure the success and quality of supported employment from the perspective of persons with severe disabilities (Budd, Sigelman, & Sigelman, 1981). Some of the problems involved in assessing this population include definition ambiguity, lack of valid and reliable measures, communication limitations of respondents, and positive response bias (Heal & Sigelman, 1990).

A few studies have measured the success of supported employment from the perspective of persons with severe disabilities, by looking at outcome measures such as job satisfaction and quality of life (McAfee, 1986; Parent, 1994; Sandow, Rhodes, Mank, Ramsing, & Lynch, 1990; Schalock, Keith, Hoffman, & Karan, 1989). Test and his colleagues (Test, Alford, & Keul, 1991; Test, Hinson, Salow, & Keul, 1993) have been leaders in research aimed at determining the overall job satisfaction of supported employees. Test, et al. (1991) investigated the job satisfaction of 18 individuals who were working in the individual placement or enclave models of supported employment. The majority of individuals reported that they liked their job and job coach and were satisfied with their wages and coworker relationships. Test et al. (1993) reported similar findings in a second study, involving 34 individuals working in supported employment. Participants were found to like their jobs and job coaches and were more satisfied with their current job than their previous workshop placement. In both of these studies, the participants' responses were verified for accuracy by supported employment staff.

An extensive, three year, longitudinal study conducted in Illinois was designed to evaluate the impact of supported employment by comparing employment outcomes such as personal growth, wages, integration, and consumer satisfaction for 53 individuals in sheltered employment to the employment outcomes of 53 individuals who had moved from sheltered to supported employment (Corporate Alternatives, Inc., 1990). Results from the study suggested that the individuals who moved to supported employment were more satisfied overall with their present placements and their families reported that they were more happy in their supported employment situation. Moseley (1988) conducted a qualitative study to assess the job satisfaction and quality of life of individuals with severe mental retardation in supported employment who had previously been in sheltered workshops. He reported that the workers were more satisfied with their competitive employment situation due to factors related to job tasks, better pay, more consistent work, and fewer distractions.

Coker, Osgood, & Clouse (1995) compared the job satisfaction and economic benefits of persons with disabilities participating in the sheltered employment, enclave, affirmative industry, and job coach employment models. The study evaluated several components of job satisfaction, including consumer choice over taking the job, preference with the type of work they were doing, satisfaction with where they worked, and satisfaction with their pay. Results from the study

indicated that a majority of the employees chose to work at their current placement, were doing the type of work that they wanted, liked where they worked, and were content with their pay. Overall, however, the sheltered employees were less satisfied with their job than were workers in more integrated service delivery models.

Quality supported employment services are best measured by the effect they have on the people they serve and the level of satisfaction experienced by those individuals (Bradley & Bersani, 1990; Mank, Sandow, & Rhodes, 1991; National Council on Disability, 1995). Supported employment was created for persons with severe disabilities and should, consequently, rely on consumers for feedback on how the program is serving and can better serve their needs. Consumer feedback on the success and quality of supported employment can provide supported employment provider agencies and vocational rehabilitation with vital information regarding whether the program has assisted consumers in achieving their career goals. The Consumer Satisfaction Survey (Parent, 1994) was developed to give individuals with disabilities an opportunity to voice their satisfaction with their employment situation and the supported employment service delivery system. The tool can be used as an evaluation instrument to assess the quality and success of supported employment services as well as a mechanism for determining individual choices and feedback.

This study was designed to investigate the supported employment experiences of persons with disabilities to determine what they like and dislike about their jobs and the services they receive, and how much involvement they had or would like to have had in choosing their jobs and support services. It expands upon earlier efforts in several ways. First, individuals with disabilities were involved in all aspects of its development and implementation including designing the instrument, establishing administration procedures, conducting face-to-face satisfaction interviews, and completing the Consumer Satisfaction Survey. Second, it takes a broad view of the concept of satisfaction, which includes the individuals' perceptions of their pay and benefits, supervisor and coworker relations, job and work conditions, job coach, and supported employment. Third, the study developed and validated instrumentation and interview protocols for evaluating supported employment services that include individuals with severe disabilities. Fourth, the investigation provides important feedback for service providers, policymakers, and rehabilitation professionals regarding consumer choice and satisfaction in supported employment for individuals who are working and receiving services. The findings from this study and their implications for supported employment will be discussed.

METHOD

Participants

One hundred ten individuals with severe disabilities, 66 men and 44 women were randomly selected from the total population of 3,431 of persons who participated in supported employment in Virginia during the period between July 1988 and August 1992. Each individual who was selected was employed in the individual placement model of supported employment (Wehman & Kregel, 1985). In addition, each individual was working at his or her first supported employment job and was currently working in only one competitive employment situation. A stratified random sampling procedure with substitution was used to select 110 individuals for participating in the study. Four disproportionate groups stratified by primary disability label were randomly selected from the population including: mental retardation, mental illness, traumatic brain injury, and cerebral palsy and other physical disabilities.

Instrumentation

The Consumer Satisfaction Survey (CSS) was administered through face-to-face interviews with all of the individuals in the sample. The CSS contains multiple choice and open-ended items that are generally organized into eight categories. These categories are listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Categories of Items on the Consumer Satisfaction Survey

Consumer and Job Demographics
Pay and Benefits
Supervision
Relationship and Teamwork
Job Conditions
Job Satisfaction
Job Coach Satisfaction
Service Satisfaction

The CSS was designed by persons with disabilities who assisted in all phases of its development. Specifically, individuals with disabilities indicated what was important to them in examining consumer and job satisfaction; provided input into specific items to be included; assisted in the design of administration protocol; reviewed the instrument for content, design, and useability; and conducted interviews with study participants. General content areas and specific items were generated from a variety of additional sources, including information provided by individuals with disabilities who had received supported employment services; a review of the business, psychology, and education literature; and input by experts in the field of supported employment or survey development.

The items were summarized on the instrument in a format, structure, and wording that would be suitable for someone with a severe disability (Flynn, 1986; Sigelman, Budd, Spanhel, & Schoenrock, 1981; Sigelman, Budd, Winer, Schoenrock, & Martin, 1982). The instrument contained multiple choice and open-ended items with 10 pairs of items reworded in alternative formats to assess for systematic response bias. The CSS was pilot-tested with 24 individuals who were identified from a listing of 67 who had received supported employment services from the Rehabilitation Research & Training Center on Supported Employment (RRTC). A total of 39 persons did not participate because they could not be located, were not currently working, chose not to participate in the interview process, or were no longer receiving supported employment services. Participants reported a disability label of traumatic brain injury, mental retardation, and cerebral palsy. The instrument was revised based upon the responses of participants and the feedback they provided.

Procedure

All of the programs who were serving individuals selected for the study were contacted to obtain his or her permission. Each consumer was then contacted to explain the purpose of the study and obtain their informed consent to participate. Six primary interviewers were selected and trained to administer the CSS. One interviewer was a parent of an individual with a severe disability, two individuals had a disability themselves, one had previously worked for an independent living center, one worked for a local advocacy organization, and one was a researcher with RRTC. Six additional persons were employed as employment specialists and research assistants with RRTC conducted interviews with those persons who lived in geographical locations beyond where the primary interviewers resided and also assisted with collecting reliability data. A six hour training session was provided for the interviewers to explain the process, the procedures for conducting the interviews, and anticipated problems and responses,

followed by ongoing personal and telephone contact to address any issues as they arose.

The interviewers contacted each consumer to explain the study again, verify his or her willingness to participate, and arrange a time and location for conducting the interview. The instrument was administered verbally by the interviewer or adapted to meet the individual communication needs of each participant. Interview time varied from 15 minutes to over one hour, with the average time being 30 minutes. Data was collected over a one year period beginning in the fall of 1992 and continuing until September 1993.

Data Management

All of the forms were reviewed for completeness and data accuracy by RRTC research staff, and coded for analysis. The instrument contains 25 open-ended and 44 multiple choice questions organized into qualitative and quantitative items. Qualitative information was obtained from 24 of the 25 open-ended questions. Each of these items was coded based upon the responses obtained from participants. All completed instruments were reviewed and participant responses to these items were logged in order to identify common themes and related content. A smaller number of much broader response categories were developed for each of the questions, which sufficiently covered all of the responses identified for that question. The similar responses for each question were grouped together according to the broader categories developed for that item. A numerical code from one to ten was assigned to each of the broad categories; that was used to code the responses to each of the qualitative items.

Quantitative information was obtained from the one open-ended and 44 multiple choice questions. The three response choices for each of the multiple choice questions were assigned numerical values of one, two, or three. One open-ended question (e.g., "Do you like your job?") was also coded in this way, with responses grouped under one of three major categories: "yes," "no," and "somewhat" or "it's OK." The three response choices assigned to this question were coded numerically in a manner similar to that for the other multiple choice items.

Scale Development

Three scales, job satisfaction, service satisfaction, and choice making in the workplace, were created from the CSS for data analysis. Each of these categorical variables was converted to continuous variables by developing three subscales and scoring system for each.

Data Analysis

Frequency distributions and percentages were completed for each of the questions related to job and consumer demographics, job satisfaction, service satisfaction, and choice making at the workplace. Univariate analyses were performed for several key variables. Analysis of variance and pearson product moment correlations were completed to determine the relationship between specific variables and levels of job and service satisfaction and choice making.

Validation Analysis. The validity of the data was assessed by comparing items of similar content to check for response consistency and bias. Cell chi square analyses were performed for each of the ten pairs of items, which were related but worded differently to present a similar scenario. These pairs of questions were related to pay and benefits, supervision, relationships/teamwork, job conditions, job satisfaction, job coach satisfaction, and service satisfaction.

Significant chi square values ($p < .001$, $p < .005$) indicate a high correspondence between pairs of questions. A valid chi square analysis was prohibited due to the small sample size, which yielded cell counts of less than five on all of the items. The validity of the data was verified by reviewing the completed instruments and talking with the interviewers. None of the interviewers

reported difficulty on the part any participant in completing the entire instrument.

Reliability Analysis. Test-retest reliability was calculated to determine the CCS consistency of measurement when administered by two different interviewers on two different occasions. Reliability measures were gathered on 27% of the interviews, or 30 of the 110 instruments administered. A Pearson product moment correlation was completed to determine if there was a relationship between the responses obtained on the multiple choice questions during the first and second administrations. This approach was selected to account for the three-point rating scale used in each of the multiple choice items. A Pearson correlation coefficient of .82 was obtained. This correlation was significant at the $p < .0001$ level. The results indicated a strong direct relationship between individual responses on the CSS during the first and second administrations conducted up to two months apart by two different interviewers.

RESULTS

Consumer and Job Demographics

Consumer Characteristics. Table 2 on the following page summarizes the demographic information describing the characteristics of the consumers who participated in the study. Individuals reported having a disability label of mental retardation (30.0%), mental illness (19.1%), traumatic brain injury (20.0%), and cerebral palsy and other physical disabilities (30.9%). Close to two-thirds of the consumers (60.0%) were male and more than one third of the individuals (40.0%) were female. The ages of participants ranged from 19 to 52 with the mean age of the group being 32 years. Prior to working at their current job, consumers reported having had a previous work experience, such as having a nonsupported employment job prior to their disability (37.7%), attending a sheltered workshop (17.0%), having no primary daytime activity (17.0%), or receiving vocational training (9.4%).

Job Characteristics. Demographic information describing the characteristics of the jobs held by study participants are summarized in Table 3. Individuals reported working for a variety of different types of businesses, including commercial--for example, retail, store, shop--(37.3%), food--for example, restaurant, fast food, cafeteria--(22.7%), and public agencies--for example, church, park, service provider--(15.5%). The job titles or posi-tions held by consumers were most often reported to be clerk/office worker (26.9%), dishwasher/food prep (18.5%), and stock clerk/ warehouse worker (16.7%). Individuals worked between 6 and 44 hours per week, with the mean number of hours reported to be 28 per week. Earnings varied, with the lowest paid consumer receiving $20.00 a week and the highest paid person reporting $368.00 per week. The mean wage for participants was $159.38 per week.

Participants reported working at their jobs between one month and six years, with a mean length of employment of 2.3 years. In order to determine the effect of length of employments a Pearson product moment correlation was performed. The results indicate no relationship between length of employment and level of job satisfaction, level of service satisfaction, or degree of choice making at the workplace; therefore, this variable was not used as a covariate in the study.

Job and Service Satisfaction

Tables 4 - 10 present participant responses to key questions on the Consumer Satisfaction Survey related to pay and benefits, supervision, relationships and teamwork, job conditions, job satisfaction, job coach satisfaction, and service satisfaction. Each of these sections is briefly summarized below.

Pay and Benefits. Almost two-thirds of the consumers (62.8%) reported that the earnings from

Table 2

Consumer Demographics *(N = 110)*

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Type of Disability		
▸ Cerebral Palsy & Other Physical Disabilities	34	30.9
▸ Mental Retardation	33	30.0
▸ Traumatic Brain Injury	22	20.0
▸ Mental Illness	21	19.1
Sex		
▸ Male	66	60.0
▸ Female	44	40.0
Age		
▸ 21-30 years	55	50.5
▸ 31-40 years	27	24.8
▸ 41-50 years	23	21.1
▸ 20 years or less	2	1.8
▸ More than 50 years	2	1.8
▸ Not reported	1	
Previous Activity Prior to Working at This Job		
▸ Previous work experience (e.g., non-supported employment job)	40	37.7
▸ Sheltered Workshop (e.g., facility-based job preparation program)	18	17.0
▸ No primary daytime activity	18	17.0
▸ Vocational Training	10	9.4
▸ School	8	7.5
▸ Volunteer work	6	5.7
▸ Psychosocial clubhouse (e.g., psychiatric rehab. program)	4	3.8
▸ Day activity program (e.g., nonvocational training program)	4	3.8
▸ Not reported	4	1.9
▸ Enclave (e.g., group S.E. model)	2	1.9
▸ Odd jobs (e.g., Avon, yard work)	2	1.9

NOTE: For previous activity, more than one response allowed; percentages sum to more than 100.

Table 3

Job Demographics *(N = 110)*

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Type of Company		
▸ Commercial	41	37.3
▸ Food	25	22.7
▸ Service Provider	17	15.5
▸ Industrial	8	7.3
▸ Education	5	4.5
▸ Health Care	5	4.5
▸ Lodging	4	3.6
▸ Other	3	2.7
▸ Janitorial	1	0.9
Job Title/ Position (n=108)		
▸ Clerical/Office worker	29	26.9
▸ Food (dishwasher, back utility)	20	18.5
▸ Stockclerk/Warehouse	18	16.7
▸ Food (server, front dining)	9	8.4
▸ Janitor/Housekeeping	9	8.3
▸ Human Service	6	5.6
▸ Laborer	5	4.6
▸ Machine Operator	4	3.7
▸ Assembler/Benchwork	3	2.8
▸ Laundry	2	1.9
▸ Other (van driver)	2	1.9
▸ Groundskeeper/Landscaper	1	0.9
Hours Worked per Week		
▸ 20 hours or less	40	36.4
▸ 21-30 hours	20	18.2
▸ 31-40 hours	49	44.5
▸ More than 40 hours	1	0.9
Wages Earned per Week (n=105)		
▸ $100.00 or less	35	33.3
▸ $101.00 to $200.00	39	37.1
▸ $201.00 to $300.00	23	21.9
▸ $301.00 to $400.00	8	7.6
Length of Employment (n=109)		
▸ 1 year or less	27	24.8
▸ More than 1 - 2 years	40	36.7
▸ More than 2 - 3 years	15	13.8
▸ More than 3 - 4 years	16	14.7
▸ More than 4 - 5 years	9	8.3
▸ Greater than 5 years	2	1.8

their job were enough or more than enough for them. Approximately half of the participants (53.7%) stated that they had received a raise since they started working at their job. Over three-fourths of the individuals (81.9%) felt that their company medical benefits were inadequate as indicated by reports that their benefits did not meet any of their health-care needs or met only some of their health-care needs without supplemental assistance (e.g., Medicaid or Medicare). When asked about moving to a better job within the company, less than half of the consumers (41.2%) reported that there were plenty of jobs for anyone who wanted to change jobs within the company, including themselves. Table 4 on the following page provides a complete listing of participants' responses to these questions.

Supervision. All but one of the consumers felt they had a positive relationship with their boss, as indicated by reports that they got along great or OK with their supervisors. Approximately half of the participants (51.8%) felt that their boss treated them no differently than anyone else. The majority of the consumers (86.4%) felt that they could ask their supervisor for help if they had a question or problem about their job. More than three-fourths of the individuals (81.8%) reported that their boss was always available whenever they needed him or her.

Consumers most frequently reported that they liked their boss's management style--for example , takes time to explain, fair, good listener, jokes--(46.6%) and his or her treatment of the individual--for example, doesn't talk down to me, shows me how to do things, good to me--(37.9%). More than two-thirds of the consumers (70.4%) reported that there was nothing that they didn't like about the way their boss worked with them. For those individuals who indicated that they disliked something about their supervisor, the most frequent responses were the supervisor's treatment of the consumer (e.g., talks about me behind my back, yells at me, treats me like a child) and something lacking in his or her management style (e.g., doesn't show up, doesn't give clear instructions, not always available, never any "pats on the back"). Participants, responses to each of these questions are shown in Table 5.

Relationships and Teamwork. Approximately half of the individuals (52.3%) stated that they got along great with their coworkers. The majority of consumers (82.4%) stated that their coworkers treated them the same as all of the other employees. When asked how they felt when they were at work, more than half of the individuals (55.6%) reported that they were happy because they could see their friends. Approximately three-fourths of the consumers (73.4%) reported that they were satisfied with the amount of time they spent working together with their coworkers throughout their workday. When asked about lunch and breaks, close to three-fourths of the individuals (73.5%) stated that they spent as much time with their coworkers as they would like. Two-thirds of the individuals (66.0%) reported they spent as much time as they would like with their coworkers after work hours. Table 6 on the following page provides a listing of participants' responses to these questions.

Job Conditions. Close to half of the consumers (46.4%) thought their job was a lot of fun. Approximately two-thirds of the individuals (61.8%) stated that they liked their job duties a lot. Approximately half of the participants (54.5%) reported that they would like to be able to learn how to do more new things at their job. More than half of the individuals (55.5%) indicated that the hours they worked at their jobs were fine. When asked about the time of day that they worked, the majority of consumers (85.5%) reported that they were satisfied with their work schedule. The majority of participants (86.4%) reported that transportation to and from work was easy and did not present any problems for them. A listing of participants' responses to these questions is located in Table 7.

Table 4

Consumer Responses to Job Satisfaction Items Related to Pay and Benefits ***(N = 110)***

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Is the money you earn from your job?		
a. more than enough for you?	7	6.4
b. enough?	62	56.4
c. not enough?	41	37.3
Since you have worked here, do you		
a. expect a raise sometime	32	29.6
b. think you won't ever get a raise	18	16.7
c. have already received a raise	58	53.7
d. not reported	2	
Do you feel that the company medical benefits		
a. meet all of your health care needs	19	18.1
b. meet some of your health care needs (i.e., need to supplement with Medicaid or Medicare)	16	15.2
c. do not meet any of your health care needs (i.e., do not receive benefits)	70	66.7
d. not reported	5	
Some people think about getting a better job. What do you think?		
a. Nobody here gets to move to a different job.	23	22.5
b. Some people get different jobs here, but I probably won't.	37	36.3
c. There are plenty of different jobs in this company for those who want to change jobs, including me.	42	41.2
d. Not reported	8	

Table 5

Consumer Responses to Job Satisfaction Items Related to Supervision ***(N = 110)***

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Do you feel that you and your bosses get along		
a. great?	62	56.4
b. O.K.?	47	42.7
c. not very well?	1	0.9
Does your boss treat you		
a. good, couldn't ask for anything better?	52	47.3
b. alright, no different than anyone else?	57	51.8
c. badly, different from all of the others?	1	0.9
When you have a question or problem about your job		
a. can you ask your boss for help?	95	86.4
b. can you go to your boss for help but would rather not?	10	9.1
c. do you have to find someone else to help you out?	5	4.5
Do you feel that your boss		
a. is always available when you need him or her?	90	81.8
b. is not available as much as you would like?	15	13.6
c. is around more than you would like him or her to be?	5	4.5
What do you like about the way your boss works with you?**		
Nothing	**5**	**4.6**
Like something	**103**	**95.4**
▸ Supervisor's management style (e.g., easy-going, takes care of problems)	48	46.6
▸ Supervisor's treatment of the consumer (e.g., shows me how, says I do a good job)	39	37.9
▸ Supervisor is helpful to employees (e.g., helps when needed)	15	14.6
▸ General satisfaction with supervisor (e.g., like everything, pleased)	15	14.6
▸ Consumer's relationship with the supervisor (e.g., friends, get along well)	13	12.6
▸ Supervisor leaves the consumer alone (e.g., as along as I do my work he leaves me alone)	4	3.9
▸ Not reported	2	

Item	Frequency	Percentage
What don't you like about he way your boss works with you?**		
Nothing	**76**	**70.4**
Don't like something	**32**	**29.6**
▸ Supervisor's treatment of the consumer (e.g., doesn't tell me stuff in a nice way, not equal opportunity for advancement)	13	40.6
▸ Something lacking in the supervisor's management style (e.g., not enough meetings, doesn't follow through)	12	37.5
▸ Supervisor's behavior (e.g., mean sometimes, irritated when busy)	7	21.9
▸ Issues related to consumer's disability (e.g., doesn't assist as needed)	2	6.3
▸ Supervisor's lack of experience (e.g., not enough training)	1	3.1
▸ Not reported	2	

NOTE: **More than one response allowed; percentages sum more than 100

Job Satisfaction. The vast majority of individuals (90.0%) reported that they did like their job. More than half of the consumers (55.5%) stated that they felt their current job was OK for now but not the permanent job they would like to have. Almost three-fourths of the consumers (71.7%) stated that they liked their present job more than what they were doing before. When asked what they liked better about this job, participants most frequently reported the following: the pay--for example, more money, getting paid--(42.2%), the work conditions--for example, flexible hours, full-time, own boss, daytime hours--(34.9%), and the people--for example, friends, coworkers, supervisors, customers--(31.3%). The majority of participants (87.3%) stated that they had played a major role in choosing their jobs. Approximately three-fourths of the consumers (74.5%) reported that they found their jobs with assistance from their job coaches. More than half of the participants (55.5%) stated that, if given the choice, they would prefer to keep their same job just the way it is.

In identifying what aspects of their job that they liked, consumers most often reported the following: the people they interact with, including coworkers, supervisors, and customers--for example, nice, understand disability, supportive--(47.2%); the job duties/type of work--for example, using computers, office work, physical labor--(45.4%), the work conditions--for example, keep busy, positive atmosphere, hours, not high pressure--(32.4%); and just having a job (22.2%). Of the 57 individuals (52.8%) who indicated that they disliked some part of their job, the most frequently reported reasons were as follows: the people encountered in the work setting, including coworkers, supervisors, and customers (e.g., patronizing, customer complaints, boss not dependable, coworkers who have a bad day), the work conditions (e.g., no chance for advancement, pressure, environment), and their work schedule (e.g., work every weekend, not enough hours). Table 8 provides a listing of participants' responses to these questions.

Job Coach Satisfaction. The majority of consumers (84.5%) reported that their job coach

Table 6

Consumer Responses to Job Satisfaction Items Related to Relationships and Teamwork *(N = 110)*

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Are the people you work with		
a. nice?	78	70.9
b. alright?	32	29.1
c. mean?	0	0.0
Do you feel that you and your coworkers get along		
a. great?		
b. OK?	57	52.3
c. not very well?	52	47.7
d. not reported	0	0.0
	1	
Do your coworkers treat you		
a. the same as everyone else?	89	82.4
b. somewhat differently than other employees?	18	16.7
c. very differently from other employees?	1	0.9
d. not reported	2	
How do you feel when you are at work?		
a. I feel lonely at work	2	1.9
b. I'm happy because I can see my friends	60	55.6
c. I feel OK at work, nothing special	46	42.6
d. not reported	2	
During lunch and break, do you		
a. spend as much (or little) time with coworkers as you would like?	72	73.5
b. wish you could spend more time with coworkers?	21	21.4
c. want to spend less time with coworkers than you do.	5	5.1
d. not reported	12	
When people from work get together or go out after work, do you		
a. go along with them as much (or little) as you would like?	68	66.0
b. wish you could get together with them more often than you do?	32	31.1
c. want to go out with them less than you do?	3	2.9
d. not reported	7	

Table 7

Consumer Responses to Job Satisfaction Items Related to Job Conditions *(N = 110)*

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Do you feel that your job is		
a. a lot of fun?	51	46.4
b. sometimes boring and sometimes fun?	54	49.1
c. boring most of the time?	5	4.5
Do you enjoy the kind of work that you do?		
a. I like my job duties a lot	68	61.8
b. My job duties are OK	39	35.5
c. I don't like my job duties	3	2.7
Would you say that your job is teaching you how to do new things?		
a. I am learning as many new things as I would like to	49	44.5
b. I would like to be able to learn more new things at work	60	54.5
c. I wish I did not have to learn as many new things at my job	1	0.9
How do you like the number of hours you work?		
a. I wish I could work more or less hours	42	38.2
b. The hours of work here are fine	61	55.5
c. I would like to work different hours	7	6.4
How do you like the time of day you work?		
a I wish I could work earlier or later in the day	11	10.0
b. I wish I could work at a different time of day	5	4.5
c. The time of day that I work is fine	94	85.5
How easy is it to get to your job?		
a. Very easy, no problem at all	95	86.4
b. Sometimes I miss work because of transportation problems	7	6.4
c. I worry a lot about transportation problems	8	7.3

had been very helpful. When asked how they got along with their job coach, more than two-thirds (68.2%) stated that their relationship was great. Close to three-fourths of the participants (72.7%) reported that they would not like to change the amount of assistance received from their job coach. The majority of consumers (80.0%) reported that their job coach was always available whenever they needed help. Approximately three-fourths of the individuals (73.6%) stated that they would like their job coach to continue visiting them at the job site. Most of the consumers (87.2%) stated that, if given the choice, they would like to keep the same job coach.

When asked how their job coach had assisted them, participants most often reported the following types of assistance: learning how to do the job--for example, getting settled on the job, on-the-job training, suggestions about getting the job done--(60.2%); help with getting a job--for example, filling out applications, job interviews, preparing for a job--(58.3%); help with work-related issues--for example, case management, Social Security, transportation, personal problems--(30.6%); and general support--for example, checks on me, helps me, makes sure I'm happy, keeping my job--(26.9%). Of the 44 consumers (40.4%) who would like more help from their job coach, the following types of assistance were reported most frequently: help getting another job (e.g., finding a better job, full-time job), help with case management (e.g., housing, transportation, Social Security, budgeting), and help learning how to do something at work (e.g. different job responsibilities, learning how to do a new task, show how to make biscuits). Table 9 on the following pages summarizes participants' responses to these questions.

Service Satisfaction. Almost all of consumers (96.4%) stated that they were satisfied with the supported employment services they had received. Approximately three-fourths of the individuals felt that supported employment was helpful in finding them a job (77.8%) and that supported employment assisted them as much as could be expected (79.8%). Approximately three-fourths of the individuals (65.4%) stated that they were properly trained for their job. The vast majority of participants (91.7%) indicated that they were happy with supported employment and would recommend the services to a friend. Similarly, most of the consumers (92.6%) felt that if they lost their job or decided to change jobs, they would like to use supported employment services again.

More than two-thirds (76.3%) of the individuals stated that they were receiving all of the services that they needed. The 28 participants (26.7%) who reported a need identified the following services most often: assistance with changing jobs, improved benefits, transportation, and other services, such as GED tutoring, recreational activities, or how to access information. When asked about their life since they started working at this job, approximately three-fourths of the consumers (73.4%) felt that their life was now better. Those participants who reported that their life was better stated that since they started working they had more money, felt more productive (e.g., busy, something to do, getting out, accomplishing something), received personal rewards (e.g., more confidence, secure, self-esteem, stable), and experienced significant life changes or events (e.g., having a boyfriend, taking a cruise, moving into my own apartment, making major purchases). Table 10 on the following page provides a listing of participants' responses to each of these questions.

Group Comparisons

A significant difference was not found in levels of job satisfaction, service satisfaction, and degree of choice making at the workplace between groups of individuals with different disability labels (e.g., mental retardation, mental illness, traumatic brain injury, and cerebral palsy and other physical disabilities).

Table 8

Consumer Responses to Items Related to Job Satisfaction

(N = 110)

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Do you like your job?		
a. yes	99	90.0
b. no	4	3.6
c. somewhat	7	6.4
Which of these statements says how you feel about your job?		
a. This is the best job I could get	38	34.5
b. This job is OK for now	61	55.5
c. I wish I could have a different job	11	10.0
Do you like this job as much as what you were doing before working here?		
a. Yes, I like this job more	76	71.7
b. No, not as much	13	12.3
c. I like them both about the same	17	16.0
d. Not reported	4	
What do you like better about this job? **or** What did you like better about the other job?**		
	17	**17**
Like them both the same	**83**	**83**
Like one job better	35	42.2
▸ Pay	29	34.9
▸ Work conditions	26	31.3
▸ Coworkers, supervisors, customers	15	18.1
▸ Type of work	12	14.5
▸ Job duties	9	10.8
▸ Having a job	8	9.6
▸ Personal rewards	3	3.6
▸ Generally like job	2	2.4
▸ Location	10	
▸ Not reported		
Did you choose this job?	28	25.5
a. yes	68	61.8
b. yes, with assistance	4	3.6
c. somewhat	10	9.1
d. no		

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Who decided you should work at this job?		
a. by yourself, unassisted	8	7.3
b. by yourself, with assistance	9	8.2
c. with assistance from family and friends	7	6.4
d. with assistance from your job coach	82	74.5
e. with assistance from other professionals	3	2.7
f. with assistance from your job coach and family	1	0.9
If you had the choice, would you like to:		
a. keep your job just the way it is?	61	55.5
b. change your job to make it better?	28	25.5
c. have a different job?	21	19.1
What kinds of things do you like about your job?**		
Nothing	**1**	**0.9**
Like something	**108**	**99.1**
▸ The people I work with	51	47.2
▸ My job duties	49	45.4
▸ The work conditions	35	32.4
▸ I like having a job	24	22.2
▸ The amount of money I earn	14	13.0
▸ Personal satisfaction (e.g., I'm successful)	5	4.6
▸ The location of the company	3	2.8
▸ The job is fun	1	0.9
▸ Not reported	1	
What kinds of things don't you like about your job?**		
Nothing I don't like	**51**	**47.2**
Don't like something	**57**	**52.8**
▸ The people I work with	19	33.3
▸ The work conditions	15	26.3
▸ My work schedule	14	24.6
▸ The pay and benefits	9	15.8
▸ The job is boring	7	12.3
▸ Something about the job (e.g., unstable, no air conditioning)	6	10.5
▸ Personal issues related to the job (e.g., feet hurt)	4	7.0
▸ My job duties	4	7.0
▸ Not reported	2	

NOTE: **More than one response allowed; percentages sum to more than 100.

Table 9

Consumer Responses to Service Satisfaction Items Related to Job Coach Satisfaction *(N = 110)*

Item	Frequency	Percentage
Would you say that your job coach has been		
a. very helpful?	93	84.5
b. sometimes helpful?	17	15.5
c. not helpful at all?	0	0.0
How do you get along with your job coach?		
a. great	75	68.2
b. OK	35	31.8
c. not very well	0	0.0
Would you like your job coach to have assisted you		
a. less?	5	4.5
b. more?	25	22.7
c. about the same?	80	72.7
How would you describe the availability of your job coach?		
a. always available when I need assistance	88	80.0
b. sometimes available, but not often enough	19	17.3
c. never available when I need him/her	3	2.7
Would you like your job coach to visit you at your job site		
a. more often than he/she does?	20	18.2
b. about the same?	81	73.6
c. less often?	9	8.2
If you had a choice, would you like to:		
a. keep your same job coach?	95	18.2
b. get a different job coach?	2	73.6
c. have one of the job coaches you used to work with?	12	8.2
d. not reported	1	

What kinds of things has your job coach helped you with?**		
▸ Learning how to do the job	65	60.2
▸ Getting a job	63	58.3
▸ Dealing with work-related issues	33	30.6
▸ Providing support	29	26.9
▸ Handling problems at the job site	12	11.1
▸ Developing relationships	8	7.4
▸ Gaining personal confidence	6	5.6
▸ General satisfaction with job coach	5	4.6
▸ Implementing compensatory strategies	3	2.8
▸ Developing new skills	2	1.9
▸ Not reported	2	
What kinds of things would you like your job coach to help you with?**		
Nothing	**65**	**59.6**
Help with something	**44**	**40.4**
▸ Getting another job	13	29.5
▸ Providing case management services	9	20.5
▸ Learning how to do something at work	8	18.2
▸ Teaching new skills	5	11.4
▸ Changing the work schedule	4	9.1
▸ Maintaining more frequent communication	4	9.1
▸ Solving problems at work	3	6.8
▸ Career advancement	3	6.8
▸ Other (e.g., anything related to the job, getting automatic doors)	2	4.5
▸ Not reported	1	

NOTE: **More than one response allowed; percentages sum to more than 100.

No relationship was found between length of employment, amount of wages earned, or number of hours worked per week with level of job satisfaction, service satisfaction or choice making at the workplace.

Neither the results indicate a significant difference between persons working in different types of jobs in the level of job satisfaction, level of service satisfaction, and degree of choice making at the workplace.

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to investigate the opinions of supported employment consumers to find out how satisfied they are with their jobs, the services they receive, and the amount of involvement they have in decisions regarding their employment. The results from this study reflect

Table 10

Consumer Responses to Items Related to Service Satisfaction

(N = 110)

Item	Frequency	Percentage
How satisfied are you with the supported employment services you have received?		
a. very satisfied	0	0.0
b. satisfied	106	96.4
c. dissatisfied	3	2.7
d. very dissatisfied	0	0.0
e. no opinion	1	0.9
Do you feel that supported employment was helpful in finding you a job?		
a. Somewhat, but I think they could have done better	16	14.8
b. Yes, I don't think I would be working now without their help	84	77.8
c. No, they didn't help me at all	8	7.4
d. Not reported	2	
Were you well prepared for this job?		
a. I was properly trained for this job	70	65.4
b. I knew most of what I needed to know by the time my job coach left	31	29.0
c. My job coach left too soon	6	5.6
d. Not reported	3	
Are you happy with supported employment?		
a. yes	100	91.7
b. sort of	8	7.3
c. no	1	0.9
d. not reported	1	
Would you recommend supported employment to a friend?		
a. yes	100	91.7
b. no	0	0.0
c. maybe	9	8.3
d. not reported	1	
If you lost your job or decided to change jobs, do you think you would		
a. like to use supported employment services again?	100	92.6
b. use them if a few things could be different?	6	5.6
c. definitely not use supported employment again?	2	1.9
d. not reported	2	

What type of services do you need now that you are not receiving?**		
None	**77**	**76.3**
Need some services	**28**	**26.7**
▸ Assistance with changing jobs	8	28.6
▸ Other (e.g., budgeting, GED tutoring, how to access information)	7	25.0
▸ Transportation	6	2.14
▸ Better benefits	6	21.4
▸ Help solving problems on the job	4	14.3
▸ Housing	3	10.7
▸ Medical services	2	7.1
▸ More money	1	3.6
▸ Counseling	1	3.6
▸ More hours at work	1	3.6
▸ Not reported	5	
Since you have started working at this job, do you feel that your life has		
a. become worse?	3	2.8
b. stayed about the same?	26	23.9
c. gotten better?	80	73.4
d. not reported		
How is your life better now that you are working at this job? **or** How was your life better before you started working at this job?		
Life is the same	**26**	**25.5**
Life is different	**76**	**74.5**
▸ I have more money	33	43.4
▸ I'm more productive	21	27.6
▸ Personal benefits (e.g., more confident, better peace of mind, self-respect)	17	22.4
▸ I've had major life changes (e.g., moved into own apartment, took a cruise, bought things)	14	18.4
▸ I'm more independent	12	15.8
▸ I like the people	12	15.8
▸ I'm happier	9	11.8
▸ I like my job	8	10.5
▸ I'm learning new things	5	6.6
▸ I just like it better	4	5.3
▸ Not reported	8	

NOTE: **More than one response allowed; percentages sum to more than 100.

the views of those individuals who are actually working in competitive jobs and receiving supported employment services. The findings from this study indicate that individuals with disabilities in Virginia who are competitively employed and receiving supported employment services are overwhelmingly satisfied with their jobs. Similarities between Virginia and national supported employment service delivery and outcomes, as well as the representativeness of the sample of

participants, suggest that these findings may be generalized to the population of persons working in supported employment. The primary reasons why people like their jobs are not unlike those often identified by the general working population. These findings support previous research which suggests that workers with disabilities, as a group, are satisfied with their jobs and like them for many of the same reasons as nonhandicapped employees (McAfee, 1986). Similar positive feelings have also been reported by the few studies examining job satisfaction for individuals with disabilities who are working in supported employment (Corporate Alternatives, Inc., 1990; Test, et al., 1991).

It is likely that a major factor contributing to the high levels of job satisfaction reported by individuals with disabilities is simply that they are working. This is not surprising considering the high unemployment and underemployment rates repeatedly documented for this population (Davis, 1993; Louis Harris and Associates, 1994; Louis Harris Poll, 1986; President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities, 1992). Most of the participants in this study indicated that prior to working at this job they had had a previous work experience, had attended a sheltered workshop or day program, had had no primary daytime activity, or had received vocational training. It is important to note that those consumers who reported having a previous work experience may have been involved in an unpaid (volunteer) employment situation or other type of vocational rehabilitation placement other than competitive employment, as indicated during the interviews. Those individuals who were employed or were participating in activities that resembled employment tended to eagerly tell the interviewer that they had previously worked even though the description of their prior work experience did not always suggest competitive employment.

Although consumers felt positive about work, a common feeling expressed by many was their desire to change their job or find a different job some time in the future. These findings suggest that individuals with disabilities who receive supported employment services like their jobs and are happy to be working. Yet, like anyone else, they may not feel that their current job is their preferred permanent career. This is not surprising considering that many individuals with severe disabilities have never worked before or were involved in vocational activities in preparation for competitive employment with little opportunity to decide their job preferences or perhaps, more importantly, to act upon them. As with the entire population, actually working at a real job provides one of the best ways of gaining personal insight into the type of career and job characteristics that one is interested in.

The vast majority of individuals who are receiving supported employment services in Virginia are satisfied with those services and would recommend them to a friend, and would use them again themselves if needed. According to participants, one of the most attractive features of supported employment is the job coach, who assists with all aspects of their employment. The diversity of the job coach's role is reflected clearly evident by the respondents' reports of the many different types of services provided. It is important to note that more than half of the consumers felt they were receiving all the services they needed both from their job coach and other providers. This is quite a remarkable accomplishment for any service modality, particularly supported employment, which is targeted to serve those individuals who have more extensive support needs. Additionally, consumers were satisfied with the availability of their job coach and did not indicate a preference for changing the amount of assistance provided or the time spent visiting the job site.

Perhaps one of the most significant findings of this study is confirmation that the lives of individuals with severe disabilities get better once they receive supported employment services and

enter the competitive labor force. Although this assumption has been the driving force behind the development and expansion of supported employment services, investigations aimed at documenting this phenomenon have been largely inconclusive due to the methodological challenges associated with measuring quality of life (Conte, Murphy, & Nisbet, 1989; Inge, Banks, Wehman, Hill, & Shafer, 1988; Moseley, 1988). The changes attributed to improved quality of life for consumers of supported employment are remarkably similar to those frequently reported by individuals who do not have a disability (Flanagan, 1978; Taylor, 1987; Zautra & Goodhart, 1979).

In general, consumers of supported employment in Virginia have a moderate degree of choice in selecting their jobs and the services they receive. The primary area where this appears to be most evident is in choosing the jobs that they would like to have. As indicated by previous research, individual involvement in choosing one's job greatly enhances quality of work, job satisfaction, and quality of life for workers with and without a disability (Brown, 1988; Kiernan & Knutson, 1990; Mittler, 1984). This study supports these findings as demonstrated by the major role consumers played in choosing their job and the high degree of job satisfaction they experienced.

Consumers were extremely satisfied with supported employment services and did not indicate that they would like to change their job coach if given the choice. However, in regard to their jobs, close to half of the individuals felt that they would rather change their job to make it better or find a different job if they had the choice. One explanation may be that individuals with severe disabilities are not provided with true choices about where they want to work but rather the better of two alternatives (e.g., "Do you want to work?", "Would you like to work at this job?") giving the impression that they have choices and therefore positively influencing their response to this question (West & Parent, 1992). A second explanation may be that individuals are working in jobs that don't offer opportunities for career advancement or job mobility. Perhaps the lack of job flexibility is a reflection of the job market and types of positions individuals are employed in that may provide only minimal movement for any employee to move up the career ladder. Finally, it may be that consumers are choosing their jobs; however, these choices are likely to be based upon limited experiences and few opportunities to develop job preferences. Therefore, it is not uncommon for individuals to develop new preferences and change their job choices once they become exposed to real work settings and actually see what different employment situations have to offer.

The latter suggestion supports the need for increased assistance by job coaches in addressing the specific aspects of a job that consumers do not like so that desired modifications in their job situation can be made. The importance of persons being able to choose jobs that match their interests and then to make changes in their jobs in response to their developing desires and needs is clearly documented in the literature related to job satisfaction for persons who do not have a disability (Henne & Locke, 1985; Rosenthal, 1989). Reports by consumers that they don't like everything about their job and lack the opportunity to be included in decision making about their work suggests that these issues are not being adequately addressed in many supported employment service delivery systems.

Several methodological considerations are identified that may limit the application of these findings to all supported employment participants. First, only consumers who were receiving supported employment services from programs in Virginia were selected to participate. Although similarities between Virginia and national supported employment outcomes are noted, unique features in Virginia's service delivery system may result in consumers' feeling differently about their jobs and services compared to supported

employment participants in other states (Kregel et al., 1990; Rehabilitation Research & Training Center, 1992). Second, all of the consumers who participated in this investigation were employed in their first supported employment job and working at the time of the study. It is possible that very different findings might result if the study included individuals with varied work histories. Third, the focus of this study was on determining the absolute satisfaction of individuals with disabilities who are working with assistance from supported employment services. Interpretation of these findings are limited due to the lack of participation by persons who are not in supported employment which would establish a basis for comparison.

Future research is needed to compare the employment experiences of workers with and without a disability to determine if supported employment consumers like their jobs more or less than nonhandicapped employees. Research in this area would provide a baseline measure for evaluating the effectiveness of supported employment in comparison to the job satisfaction of the general population of people who are working in similar positions at the same types of jobs. Additional research investigating the opinions of a large number of individuals with a variety of different disabilities is needed to determine the specific elements of their work situations that influence their feelings about their jobs. A study examining specific job types will assist with the identification of the unique characteristics and issues within different industries as well as their impact on the employment experiences and levels of satisfaction felt by employees of the company. A longitudinal study designed to investigate consumer satisfaction in supported employment repeatedly over time needs to be conducted. A study of this nature would describe the effects of job and service satisfaction and consumer choice on the employment outcomes of workers with disabilities. In addition, future research should assess the relationship between local program efforts to improve consumer involvement in sup-ported employment and the impact these strategies have on satisfaction and job retention.

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Abstract

This article is intended to challenge the field of supported employment to enter into a new dialogue in which professionals agree that all people, regardless of life circumstances, need support systems in order to be successful. Furthermore, support systems can look vastly different from one another. The authors suggest that little benefit comes from arguing over which is better, or more cost efficient: natural supports or job coaching. An alternative approach would be to view all support strategies in a customer service and accommodation framework. The concept of customer service is discussed and suggestions for identifying person to person support strategies are provided.

ENSURING SUPPORT SYSTEMS THAT WORK: GETTING BEYOND THE NATURAL SUPPORTS VS. JOB COACH CONTROVERSY

By: Katherine J. Inge & George Tilson

Currently, in the field of supported employment for people with disabilities, there is much bantering on the subject of natural supports vs. job coach supports, and whether the presence of job coaches in the workplace hinders or enhances employment efforts (DiLeo, Luecking, & Hathaway, 1995; Nisbet & Hagner, 1988; Parent, Unger, Gibson, Clements, Kane, & Kregel, 1994; Test & Wood, 1997; Wehman, 1993; West, 1992). Nisbet and Hagner (1988) first proposed natural supports as an alternative concept to supported employment services. They feel that the presence of job coaches within the workplace prevents the consumer from developing relationships with coworkers and supervisors. They further suggest that job coaches stigmatize the supported employment worker and promote the idea that there is a mystique or magic to supporting workers with disabilities. Nisbet and Hagner proposed that vocational service professionals see themselves as facilitators who assist businesses rather than as providers of services. They outlined several alternative natural support models including paying coworkers for assuming the responsibilities of supervising and training workers with disabilities.

Since this original article, the concept of natural supports has been widely debated and numerous definitions have been suggested. Moon and her colleagues (Moon, Inge, Wehman, Brooke, & Barcus, 1990) defined natural supports as formal and informal mechanisms that exist in a work environment which can be used to sustain an employee's performance. Their definition further specified that these supports are not artificial or manufactured for the employee with a disability, and every workplace has some level that is offered to all employees. Examples of natural supports strategies include employee assistance programs, supervision, employee associations as well as assistance with job tasks, directional cues, job sharing, and coworker support. These authors suggested that the job coach's responsibility is to identify and facilitate these natural supports while providing assistance and support for the customer to learn his or her job duties.

More recently, DiLeo, Luecking, and Hathaway (1995) defined natural supports as having two key features. The first feature is to assist the employer in facilitating, enhancing, or expanding the existing strategies and resources for supporting and accommodating the employee with a disability. The second is to assist the supported employee in receiving ongoing support from coworkers while becoming a valued member of the workforce. The role of the job coach is seen primarily as a facilitator or technical assistance provider. In other words, the "preexisting support mechanisms natural to the work setting are maximized [while] human service interventions artificial to the work setting are minimized."

Parent and her colleagues (Parent et al., 1994) described natural supports as an array of community and workplace support options. They view the job coach's role as one of assisting the customer to identify, develop, and access support resources or services; to evaluate the effectiveness of the supports; and to arrange alternative provisions as the need arises. The customer ultimately chooses who will provide assistance in accessing the community and workplace supports, and how the assistance will be provided. In other words, these authors consider that natural supports are a part of supported employment rather than a separate concept.

Much of the confusion and misunderstanding around natural supports and supported employment occurs when professionals view these ideas as opposing or separate concepts. The natural support literature often points to poor supported employment outcomes and the inability of job coaches to fade from job sites as reasons for implementing natural support strategies (Test & Wood, 1996). For instance, Murphy and Rogan (1996) criticize "traditional" supported employment training by saying that it leads to the exclusion of coworkers and supervisors from the training process. Hagner, 1992 also concludes that the presence of job coaches isolate supported employees from interactions with supervisors and coworkers. Unfortunately, these comments sometimes result in the conclusion that natural supports is preferred while support and training by a job coach is somehow undesirable.

However, best practices in supported employment have always called for job coaches to incorporate coworkers and supervisors into the training of the supported employee (Moon, Goodall, Barcus, & Brooke, 1986, Moon et al., 1990; Wehman, 1981). In fact, many proponents of using "natural supports" conclude that training by the job coach is necessary when the naturally occurring supports of the workplace are not sufficient to meet the needs of the worker.

> ***"Clearly, these efforts should not negate the fact that we have powerful training technologies that can be used"*** (Nisbet and Hagner, 1988, p.264).
>
> ***"Systematic instruction is a powerful training technology that is critical to helping people who need intensive training to learn productive work skills"*** (DiLeo et al., 1995, p.74).

Well-designed instruction which is customer-driven does not segregate individuals with severe disabilities. Rather, poor practices isolate the individual with a disability such as the job coach who fails to include the customers: the supported employee and the employer, in the design and implementation process.

Callahan (1992) suggests that good training must maintain a balance between natural validity and instructional power. Natural validity is seen as the training and support that is available in any community setting (Marc Gold & Associates, 1990). Instructional power is the amount of assistance and creativity that is necessary to teach the customer how to participate in the workplace (Gold, 1980). If use of natural supports is the only strategy considered, then individuals with the most severe disabilities will be excluded from community employment (Callahan, 1992; Wehman, 1993). If support and training by the job coach are used exclusively, then many customers will remain dependent on their coaches and ultimately never be integrated into the work culture.

NEW VISIONS AND CHALLENGES

This article is intended to challenge the field to enter into a new dialogue in which professionals agree that all people, regardless of

life circumstances, need support systems in order to be successful. Furthermore, support systems can look vastly different from one another. The authors suggest that little benefit comes from arguing over which is better, or more cost efficient: natural supports or job coaching. An alternative approach would be to view all support strategies in a customer service and accommodation framework.

Support Recipients

It is safe to say that all individuals have played the customer role multiple times during the course of their lives; everyone at some point is a seeker and recipient of goods and services. That common experience can provide a basis for understanding the job coach/employment specialist's role in ensuring successful participation of people with disabilities in the workforce. Employment specialists have two critical customers: job seekers/employees and employers, all of whom have unique expectations and needs.

In their book, A Working Relationship, Fabian, Luecking, and Tilson (1994) cite a series of focus groups that were held to determine perceptions of different stakeholders of factors leading to successful employment outcomes for people with disabilities. One cohort, comprised of people with disabilities, identified the following as a critical factor: employment specialists with expertise in career exploration, local job market, and networking. The group comprised of business people pointed to a need for assistance from professionals in the field. They identified the following activities as being essential characteristics of employment specialists: ability to deliver timely and responsive follow-up; knowledge of business needs; and ability to screen applicants to determine strong employment matches. Clearly, both of these customer groups welcomed appropriate support services.

Support Defined Generically

If Gertrude Stein was around today, she might be inclined to respond: "Support is support is support." Shakespeare, if asked, might have offered "A support by any other name would smell as sweet." The authors suggest that support of people with disabilities in the workplace consists of two important facets: customer service and accommodation.

Customer Service

The following questions indicate the factors paramount to success in the business world: Is our customer happy with the goods and services rendered? To what extent are we assured customers will continue to do repeat business with us?

Such thinking should be adopted by professionals who work in the field of employment for people with disabilities. Are our job seeker customers satisfied with our services? Do they view our assistance as valuable? To what degree did our employer customers react to our services favorably? Do they want to continue their association with us? Do they enthusiastically endorse our services to other businesses?

The bottom line should be a high level of satisfaction with the services delivered to all of our customers. To ascertain whether or not this is being achieved, employment specialists and their organizations must continuously and stringently seek feedback from these customers (Hargrove, 1995; LeBouf, 1987). Ultimately each customer decides if the support given was:

- intrusive, disruptive, inconvenient, time-consuming, unnecessary, wasteful or
- welcome, useful, convenient, efficient, needed, resourceful.

Every individual receiving services will have a different answer to these questions; therefore, employment specialists must become seasoned consultants and be able to thoroughly understand this concept and respond accordingly. It may be that professional development bears a significant responsibility for inadequate preparation of employment specialists, particularly in the areas of consultation

skills, customer service orientation, marketing, effective listening and critical observation skills, communication strategies, and performance self-appraisal (DiLeo & Langton, 1993; Bissonnette, 1994; Fabian, et al, 1994; Levinson, 1993).

Employment specialists must develop and hone a solid customer service orientation (DiLeo & Langton, 1993; Fabian, et al., 1994; Fabian & Luecking, 1991). They need to listen to each customer, determine what that individual wants, assess his/her current situation, and decide what can be offered in the way of assistance. They must be capable of frequently soliciting feedback from their customers and modifying their support services.

Accommodation

The Oxford American Dictionary (1980) defines "accommodate" as "to provide or supply; to adapt; to make harmonize". The ADA defines "accommodation" as "any change in the work environment or in the way things are usually done that results in equal employment opportunity for an individual with a disability" (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 1992, p. I-5). In a 1993 PBS special program on employment of people with disabilities (Resnick, 1993), Tilson suggested that the complexities of reasonable accommodation might be simplified using three categories:

(1) Physical Modifications and Materials
(2) Special Services
(3) People to People Action

Physical accommodations include any modifications to existing structures, adaptations to equipment, the provision of special equipment or materials, and/or assistive technology. Accommodation under the "Special Services" category would include interpreters, readers, job coaches, personal care attendants, service animals, etc. These two categories of accommodation are the most easily understood and often the most easily provided, although they can be the most costly.

The third category of accommodation is difficult to name; the authors have called it "people to people action." This is the largest of the accommodation categories. In point of fact, the majority of accommodation strategies fall into this category. Furthermore, this category tends to represent supports that are the least expensive. Table 1 on the following page details an array of "people to people" accommodations. The reader will undoubtedly recognize these as examples of what the field calls natural cues, natural contingencies and reinforcement, compensatory strategies, self-management strategies, among others.

STRATEGIES FOR DELIVERING APPROPRIATE SUPPORT SERVICES

Roles of the Employment Specialist

Brooke, Wehman, Inge, and Parent (1995) outline several roles for employment specialists using a customer-driven approach to supported employment. These include the planner, consultant, technician, and community resource roles. While the authors detail the functions for assisting the employee as the customer, these roles also are applicable to the employer as the customer. For instance, when assuming a planner role, the employment specialist works with the job seeker and the employer to identify and analyze the supports and services that are available within the workplace. Simultaneously, the employment specialist, acting as a community resource, is identifying supports and services in the community such as transportation options, independent living supports, assistive technology resources, and so forth. Once these supports and resources are identified, the employment specialist can serve as a consultant to the employee and the employer recommending various strategies based on his/her knowledge and expertise. The customers can then decide which supports and resources are desired.

Table 1

People to People Action Strategies

Strategy	Example
Self-monitoring	**Customer has difficulty completing work within a specified time period.** Customer uses a timer and a chart to monitor how long it takes to complete a specific job duty. Feedback from the chart assists the worker in meeting the job expectations.
Picture Cue	**Customer has difficulty discriminating between work supplies.** Tape a picture of the work task on each container.
Reinforcement	**Customer has difficulty meeting production standard.** Provide feedback hourly and ask employee to assist with greeting restaurant patrons if a pre-agreed upon amount of work has been completed.
Pre-taped instructions	**Customer has difficulty reading copy requests to determine work assignments.** Tape record instructions for copy requests.
Visual Cue	**Customer has difficulty remembering when to re-stock the condiment bar.** Place a piece of colored tape on the inside of the condiment bar as a visual reminder.
Auditory Cue	**Customer has difficulty taking breaks on time.** Customer uses a pre-programmed wrist watch.

During the initial employment period, the employment specialist may assume the technician/ trainer role by assisting the employee to learn his or her job duties. This may be necessary for new employees who have a large gap between their current skills and the skills required for the position. The "trick" is to provide sufficient support to the customer in order for him/her to learn the identified skills while including the supervisors and coworkers in the development and implementation of the plan. Skillful employment specialists are aware that they need a systematic strategy for fading from the workplace beginning the first day of a job-site training program.

Clearly, at any time, the employer or coworkers can and should assume any of the above identified roles. For instance, coworkers are usually excellent consultants when the employment specialist is developing task analyses, identifying natural cues and supports, and designing strategies for the new employee to be successful in the workplace. Or, a coworker may assume the responsibility for training the new employee to complete a specific job duty. The employee, employer, and employment specialist must decide together who will assume which roles and when. Most likely, a team approach will result in the best outcomes for all customers.

Identifying Supports

Typically, employees as customers will need assistance identifying supports within the work-

place regardless of who provides that assistance: the employment specialist, coworkers, the supervisor. A company may have varying levels of resource options from which to choose; however, the worker may not know how to access or benefit from their use. He/she may be unaware of a potential support, how to choose among the support alternatives, or how to access a desired resource (Parent et al., 1995). The following questions and answers offers some points to consider when facilitating people to people action.

What are the possible support options?

There could be many different ways to approach the same support need such as: a) using a coworker mentor to assist the customer in responding to a natural cue to increase his/her production; b) asking a supervisor to assist the customer in monitoring his/her work production; or c) having an employment specialist train the customer to monitor his/her production using a self-management program. The employment specialist with the assistance of the employee and employer should identify and review all of the different support strategies and options before a support is selected. Table 2 on the following page provides several different "people to people" solutions that could be useful for an individual who is having difficulty remembering his job duty schedule.

There may not be any one "best" solution to a support need. When selecting between the people to people options, the employment specialist and his/her customers should decide 1) which strategy or strategies is/are acceptable to the employee and employer, 2) which one matches the learning style of the employee, and 3) which one allows the employee to be as independent as possible. The team should begin with the least intrusive or most natural options before trying more intrusive strategies. In the Table 2 example, the most natural options would be for the coworkers or supervisor to praise the worker for a job well done and remind him if he had skipped an area of the store. However, a more intrusive choice such as self-instruction or a compensatory strategy would be needed if the employee did not respond to the naturally occurring reinforcement and contingencies.

What are the customers' choices?

The employment specialist should not assume that supports will be provided by the employer or coworkers for all of the worker's needs. The employer's and/or coworkers level of comfort with supplying the identified support should be determined. In addition, does the worker want the employer or coworker assisting with a particular support? For instance, a customer may be hesitant to ask a stranger for personal care support such as eating, and coworkers also may feel uncomfortable providing the support. However, as relationships develop in the workplace, this people to people assistance usually will evolve naturally. Initially, the employment specialist can facilitate this by asking coworkers to eat lunch with the customer and modeling how to provide support. Other individuals facing the same situation may choose to hire a personal assistant while still others may choose to forego eating during work hours.

Which strategies match the learning style or needs of the employee?

While there may be many support options available in the workplace, an employee will respond to any particular choice based on his/her learning style. Some individuals may respond to verbal instructions, while others need detailed demonstrations and repeated practice to learn a new job duty. For instance, a supervisor may be willing to provide support to a customer by monitoring his/her work performance at set intervals of time. However, if the customer does not respond to verbal instructions offered by the supervisor, there is a gap between the support provided and support needed.

Table 2

Sample Solutions of "People to People Action"

Issue: Customer has difficulty remembering job duty sequence. Customer is responsible for vacuuming the third floor of the department store. He is having difficulty remembering to vacuum all the different departments (e.g., shoes, coats, cosmetics, and so forth) as well as finishing his other job tasks.	
Coworker feedback	Coworker offers to check work at a specified time and remind worker if he has skipped an area of the department store.
Self-recording using a picture book	Job coach assists the customer in making a picture book with pages representing each section of the store and other job duties that must be completed. Customer checks off each page as the work is finished. Supervisor offers to assist the customer in keeping up with the book and making a new one as needed.
Pre-taped instructions	Customer uses a walkman with pre-taped message which lists the sections of the store to be vacuumed. He plays the tape if needed to double check that all work has been completed.
Reinforcement	Coworkers comment on completed work. ("Joe, I noticed that you did a really good job today in lady's shoes!" "You did great getting behind all the cosmetic counters.")
Self-instruction and natural cues	Job coach works with the customer to develop a pattern for vacuuming the department store. This pattern is developed using landmarks in the store for visual cues. The customer verbally instructs himself by saying, "First, I vacuum the area in front of the elevators. Next, I vacuum around all the cosmetic counters...etc."

In this example, the employment specialist may work with the employer and employee to determine if the supervisor needs information on how to support the individual (e.g., training in providing model vs. verbal prompts). Or, they may decide that the employee prefers for the employment specialist to assist him/her initially with learning the task. If this is the selected option, the employment specialist must be conscious of fading support to the supervisor as quickly as possible.

Which support option results in or promotes independence?

Would the identified support create dependence on coworkers when independence should be the goal? Dependence on coworkers to provide support to the employee may be as intrusive as creating dependence on the employment specialist. Situations may occur when coworkers are not available to assist the customer with an identified support, and high turnover may result in a breakdown of the support system.

For instance, one individual was having difficulty punching in at the beginning and end of his work shift. He was unable to select his time card, since he could not recognize or remember his social security number. The employment specialist decided that a coworker should be assigned to assist the individual in locating the card and

punching in or out. Although the employer was willing to provide the support, this particular idea creates dependence on the coworkers.

While every worker needs to rely on coworkers for some assistance and support, employment specialists should not create situations that perpetuate learned helplessness. In this instance, a color cue added to the timecard may result in the worker learning to select it independently; he may learn to place the card in a particular location; or he may learn to match the social security number on the timecard to a cue card that he keeps in his pocket. A coworker might assist by placing the color cue on the card, by checking to see that the individual successfully keeps it in the specified location, or by making sure that the worker has his cue card. The individual would have responsibility for independently completing the task while receiving support from his coworkers.

Designing a People to People Support "Package"

Once all of the available supports have been identified, the employee, employer, and employment specialist can select a support strategy. In most instances, a combination of strategies will be needed to promote employment success. This combination of supports may include coworker support, employment specialist training, identification of natural cues in the environment, reinforcement, compensatory strategies, assistive technology devices, and so forth. Any member on the support team: the employer, coworkers, supervisor, employment specialist, family member, can be the leader in identifying and/or providing the support. In one situation, the coworker may be the person who identifies a natural cue that will assist the worker, while the employment specialist provides the training on the job duty. In another instance, the employment specialist may be the one who identifies an assistive technology device, while the coworker takes the lead on making sure that the device remains operational and available to the customer. Table 3 on the following page provides a case study example of a people to people support package.

Summary and Recommendations

The argument over "natural supports vs. job coach supports" is only as useful as the actual services received by our customers. Perhaps more of our professional energies should be spent determining 1) which supports meet the needs of our customers; 2) whether our customers are satisfied with the support provided; and 3) what more can we do to ensure their satisfaction? One only needs to delve into the business literature to ascertain that business is obsessed with such themes as dialoguing with customers and ensuring the quality of the product. The business world depends on employees who understand these concepts, and the field of employment for people with disabilities must emulate the business world in this area.

This article has attempted to provide a context within which supports can be identified and selected for supported employment customers. The authors propose looking at workplace supports within a customer service and accommodation framework which recognizes that all individuals regardless of abilities will need support systems in order to be successful. Perhaps, the question is not: "is the support provided natural?" Rather the question should be "is the support effective and are our customers satisfied?"

Table 3

Support Case Study

Customer is hired to enter names into company mailing list.

Challenges:

- learning how to use the data entry program
- physically manipulating the work materials
- meeting the production standard

Customer needs to enter addresses using a computer.		
1.	**Accommodations (low technology devices)**	Job coach works with supervisor and customer to modify the work space. Job coach finds a work table which is accessible for customer. Work site pays for table. Job coach gets blocks to raise the table to adequate work height. Customer brings headpointer to work to use for data entry.
2.	**Instruction (Time delay)**	Job coach and coworker develop task analysis for data entry. Customer, supervisor, and job coach decide that the job coach will assist the customer in learning the data entry program using a time delay strategy with a verbal prompt. Job coach carefully fades assistance using the time delay strategy.
3.	**Color Cue**	Customer and job coach discuss mistakes in data entry. Customer is having difficulty distinguishing l vs. I. The job coach uses a pink and green highlighter pin to add a color cue. This cue is faded as customer begins to distinguish the letters.
Customer needs to use the telephone to buzz supervisor for assistance.		
1.	**Accommodations (low technology device)**	Job coach brainstorms with the supervisor and employee how the customer will contact the supervisor when assistance is needed. Job coach identifies a device to hold the telephone receiver. Supervisor provides money to pay for device.
2.	**Coworker assistance**	Coworker offers to check to make sure phone is in the device at the beginning of the work day.
Customer needs a way to manipulate the paper with names for data entry.		
1.	**Specialized accommodation**	Rehabilitation counselor provides funding for rehabilitation engineer to develop a work stand and paper holding device.
2.	**Coworker assistance**	Coworker offers to place pages on device at the beginning of the work day. She also offers to enlarge the type on the pages on the copy machine so that it is easier for customer to read.
3.	**Instruction**	Customer, job coach, and supervisor discuss training on device. Customer decides that job coach will develop a task analysis and train her to use device.
Customer needs to increase data entry speed.		
1.	**Self-monitoring**	Supervisor, customer, and job coach discuss the need for increased production. Job coach obtains a timer and records customer's data entry speed. He pre-sets the timer for a faster time. Customer uses the timer to monitor data entry speed.
2.	**Reinforcement**	Coworker offers to check on the customer and praise when she notices that customer is meeting the time requirement.

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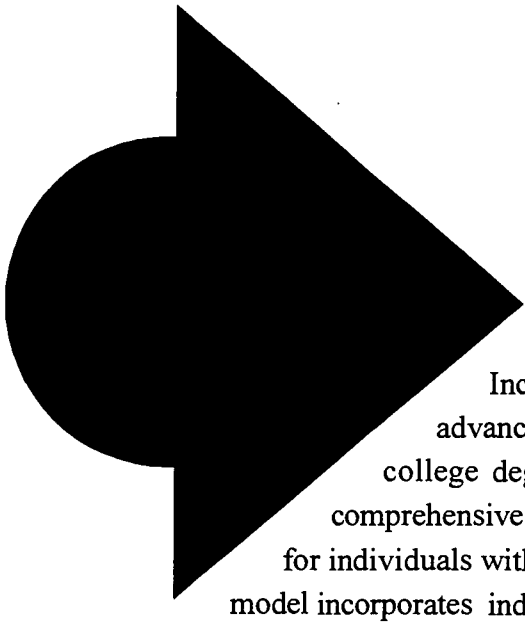

Abstract

Increasing numbers of individuals with disabilities are securing advanced educational opportunities beyond high school. Yet, earning a college degree does not guarantee employment. This article describes a comprehensive transition model designed to enhance employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities as they graduate from post-secondary settings. The model incorporates individualized career planning, the identification of learner accommodations, work experience prior to graduation, direct placement assistance, and follow-up support after graduation.

TRANSITIONING FROM THE ACADEMIC TO THE EMPLOYMENT SETTING: THE EMPLOYMENT CONNECTION PROGRAM

By: Elizabeth E. Getzel & John Kregel

Increased numbers of individuals with disabilities are seeking post-secondary education opportunities. Approximately 9% of freshmen enrolled full-time in college in 1991 reported having a disability, a substantial increase from the 1978 rate of 2.6 percent (Henderson, 1992). The needs of students with disabilities exiting secondary special education programs and entering two and four year institutions of higher education are well documented (Berkell, 1989; Boyer-Stephens, 1990; Butler-Nalin & Marder, & Shaver, 1989; deFur, Getzel, and Trossi, 1996; Fairweather & Shaver, 1991; Siperstein, 1988; & Wehman, 1992;). However, less attention has been focused on the transition needs and career attainment rates of students once they exit college and enter employment (Adelman & Vogel, 1990; Altschul, Smart, Michaels, & Park, 1993).

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, with its civil rights provisions embodied in Section 504, mandates colleges and universities receiving federal funds to insure equal treatment for individuals with disabilities during the recruitment period, the admission process, and the term of enrollment. Although legislation has made post-secondary education available to students with disabilities, availability does not insure access (Siperstein, 1988) or success in a chosen program of study. For example, in Virginia, less than 20% of students with disabilities remain enrolled in their post-secondary programs 18 months after their graduation from high school (VA Department of Education, 1993). Many different factors combine to make it exceedingly challenging for individuals with disabilities to complete post-secondary educational programs and embark on meaningful careers. In many instances, students' unique needs go unrecognized or unmet (Reiff & deFur, 1992; Walter & Welsh, 1986). In other instances, students may be hampered by varying or limited support services, large student-instructor ratios, and limited direct student-instructor contact which result in insufficient individualized attention (Dalke & Schmitt, 1987; Dexter, 1982). Finally, students with disabilities in post-secondary educational settings often face discrimination in the form of negative or prejudicial attitudes held by faculty members, administrators, and other members of the student body (West, et al., 1993).

Individuals with disabilities who complete post-secondary educational programs continue to face many obstacles when attempting to access employment and pursue their careers. Recent information (Louis Harris and Associates, 1994) indicates that two-thirds of adults with disabilities between the ages of 16 and 64 are not working. However, four out of five (79%) currently unemployed adults would prefer to be working, but report that they face many obstacles, both real and artificial, as they attempt to join the labor force.

Many of the obstacles faced by persons with disabilities are due to a lack of needed services and supports, as opposed to any lack of ability or motivation to contribute to the work

force. For example, the Louis Harris and Associates 1994 study found that one-third of currently unemployed adults with disabilities indicate a need for assistance in finding jobs, one-third need education or training, one-fourth would benefit from personal assistance services, and one-fourth require transportation to and from the employment setting.

The employment obstacles identified in the national Louis Harris study illustrate the need to develop new and innovative service delivery models which will make it more likely that individuals with disabilities will be able to use the skills and knowledge acquired in post-secondary educational settings. The purpose of this article is to describe a comprehensive approach for making available to individuals with disabilities the services, supports, and opportunities necessary to enable them to successfully make the transition from post-secondary educational settings to long-term employment in a meaningful job of their choice. In the next section, the need for unique types of services and supports will be described in detail. In the final section, the specific components of the post-secondary education transition model will be thoroughly discussed.

TRANSITION NEEDS OF STUDENTS IN POST-SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

To maximize the contribution of their post-secondary educational experience, alternatives are needed which will enable individuals to develop and implement their own career plans, access needed learner accommodations while in post-secondary educational settings, acquire crucial work experience prior to entering the labor market, and obtain needed assistance during the job search, placement and training phases of employment.

Need for Individualized Career Plans

It has been consistently recognized that students with disabilities need to develop a plan which will help them identify the accommodations and supports needed while attending a post-secondary school (Stewart, 1989). This plan should identify the supports and services that students need and enable them to specify the accommodations and modifications needed to succeed in their educational program. Less attention has been paid to the fact that this educational plan can build the basis for identifying modifications or accommodations necessary for employment (Stewart, 1989). Within a comprehensive system of career development, the educational support plan can equally focus on the employment preparation needs of students and will ensure that the necessary supports and services are identified to prepare students for the career goals they have established. The individual career plan should be created while students are in school, but should also follow them into their place of employment. The development of the plan will incorporate both academic and community supports and services needed by students. The focus of the plan will be to ensure that students with disabilities leave school with marketable skills and are linked with the community supports they need once they enter the workplace. Table 1 below provides examples of supports and services frequently reported as needed by students with disabilities in post-secondary educational settings in Virginia (Virginia Commonwealth University, 1993).

Table 1

Supports and Services Most Frequently Reported as Needed by Students in Virginia

Service	Percent
Information about service availability	22.5%
Study skills training	22.5%

Service	Percent
Support groups or clubs	20.5%
Career counseling, placement	19.7%
Tutors	19.6%
Financial aid	19.3%
Flexible testing arrangements	18.5%
Typing/word processing assistance	18.3%
Personal skills training	18.1%
Special equipment for students with learning disabilities	17.4%
Priority registration and advising	16.6%
Program modifications	16.3%
Computer/research assistance	15.8%
Notetakers	15.4%
Diagnostic testing and assessment	15.2%
Textbook tape recording	13.9%
Pre-admission information	13.5%
Personal counseling	13.5%

Need for Effective Learner Accommodations

Access to services and supports while students are attending a two or four year school is vital to the development of appropriate career goals and to identify the modifications and accommodations students may need while they pursue their academic studies and prepare for eventual employment. In a study of the concerns, needs, and satisfaction with services of students attending 36 two-year and four-year colleges and universities in Virginia, (Virginia Commonwealth University, 1993), nearly a quarter of the respondents indicated a need for information about service availability. Other frequent responses included the need for career counseling and placement services, program modifications, assistive technology devices, and personal skills training (for example, budgeting, time managem ent, and organizational skills).

It is clear that many students with disabilities continue to have an exceedingly difficult time accessing necessary services and supports. Failure to provide needed accommodations and modifications to these individuals will have a dramatic impact on both their educational careers and subsequent employment opportunities. In the absence of a coordinated, student-centered system of supports, students with disabilities will continue to experience lower retention and completion rates from programs, resulting in more limited opportunities to work in their chosen careers and a reduction in potential lifetime earnings.

Need for Work Experience Prior to Graduation

Two critical components of an effective post-secondary program are supervised work experience and career placement services (Gugerty, 1990). Opportunities to explore different career opportunities, practice skills learned in classroom settings in actual work environments, and transferring learning strategies from the artificial environment of the college or university to the "real" world for work are valuable opportunities for all post-secondary students, including students with disabilities. Unfortunately, all too often career services are not coordinated and employers are not included in programs (Maglione, 1989). As a result, students fail to benefit from the expertise of the business community and are often ill-prepared to meet the expectations of employers. To insure relevance in the post-secondary curriculum and enable students to bridge the gap between the educational and employment sectors, it is absolutely critical that employers play an integral part in the design and implementation of a career planning process.

Students with disabilities must have opportunities which establish a link between education and employment. Some of the opportunities provided by work experience programs as identified by Gugerty (1990) include:

1. becoming knowledgeable about the professional/technical workforce,
2. establishing mentors and networks in the business community, and
3. identifying companies and organizations interested in hiring individuals with disabilities.

Individuals with disabilities exiting college still face unemployment, underemployment, or lower pay as potential risks. College graduates with disabilities still experience lower employment rates than their nondisabled counterparts (Carlton, 1989). Yet, a college education for persons with disabilities still remains critical because it enables these individuals to compete more successfully for desirable positions in the job market (Cornes, 1984), and it improves employers' willingness to make necessary accommodations (U.S. Department of Labor, 1982; Harris & Associates, 1987).

Need for Placement Assistance

Students with disabilities frequently express concerns about their future beyond graduation (West, Kregel, Getzel, Zhu, Ipsen, & Martin, 1993; Schriner & Roessler, 1989; Penn & Dudley, 1980). In a follow-up conducted by Frank and colleagues (1989), graduates with disabilities were employed outside their chosen career in significantly greater numbers than graduates without disabilities. Unfortunately, inability to obtain employment in one's chosen field was the case whether it was the individual's first job after graduation or subsequent positions. For some individuals with disabilities, the strategy of obtaining entry level employment in an unrelated field after graduation while waiting for subsequently employment opportunities to develop does not seem to lead to career opportunities in the individual's chosen field. In a study of the employment preparation needs of individuals in post-secondary educational environments (Marshall, Kreston, Fried, & James, 1990), students with disabilities identified the following as key areas in which additional information or assistance would enhance their employment preparation:

1. where to locate information about available careers,
2. how to present a good impression to employers,
3. how to identify what modifications are necessary to do a job
4. how to request needed modifications from an employer,
5. how to obtain more information about their legal rights.

Additionally, students with disabilities are concerned about their financial resources, in particular Social Security programs and health insurance coverage (Schriner & Roessler, 1989). A critical component of any employment preparation and planning process is the potential impact of employment on students' Social Security disability status and health insurance coverage. If, for example, obtaining employment will make the student no longer eligible for Medicaid or Medicare, particular attention must be paid to whether a particular job or employment opportunity will provide health insurance coverage to make up for the loss of government subsidized health care. Similarly, individuals receiving financial support through Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) could benefit from information regarding Social Security work incentive programs which are designed to enable individuals to maximize their earned income while retaining eligibility for the federal income support programs. The unique challenges faced by students with disabilities reinforce the fact that a critical component of any employment preparation and planning process is the students' input and choice to enter their self-chosen careers.

Need for Post-Graduation Support Services

Strategies are needed on the post-secondary education level which address several of the difficulties still faced by students with disabilities as they prepare for future employment. The inability of students with disabilities to fully access career counseling services and other program supports results in students exiting schools inadequately prepared for careers and lacking marketable skills (Schriner & Roessler, 1989; Harris & Associates, 1986). Students with disabilities experience a significantly longer period of time job hunting than their nondisabled peers (Frank, Karst, & Boles, 1989; Thompson & Hutto, 1992). This in part may be due to the lack of previous employment experience contributing to delays in finding a job and inadequate skills in the areas of networking and job hunting. Frank, Karst, and Boles (1989) found that graduates with disabilities were more likely than other graduates to use friends and newspapers as their primary sources for their job search. However, their nondisabled peers were more likely to seek assistance from their professors or from career development and placement offices. These authors concluded that:

1. more specialized employment readiness services are needed for students with disabilities as they approach graduation,
2. a critical time in the placement success of students is between the time of graduation and the beginning of employment, and
3. vocational rehabilitation plays a critical role for students while in college and while students seek, find, and assimilate into their places of employment.

Need for Additional Support Services

Career planning and placement for individuals with disabilities requires a partnership between the student and university resources, employers, and community-based services including vocational rehabilitation. As stated earlier, vocational rehabilitation services play an important role in securing the necessary services and supports while students are in school and when they are entering employment (Frank, Karst, & Boles, 1989). Vocational rehabilitation may provide or furnish financial support to services such as (1) purchasing special equipment or assistive technology devices to assist in work place accommodations; (2) assisting in identifying potential employers; (3) providing post-employment services and supports; and (4) assisting with transportation or independent living needs.

A Comprehensive Transition Model for Students in Post-Secondary Schools

The VCU Employment Connection Model

The unique difficulties faced by students with disabilities in post-secondary educational environments - a lack of comprehensive career planning, problems in accessing needed accommodations while in school, difficulties in acquiring meaningful work experience prior to graduation, and a need for specialized placement and support services after graduation - call into question current efforts to promote the employment of these individuals. Too often, institutions of higher education assume that their responsibilities revolve solely around assisting individuals complete an academic program of study. Once that program is complete, little assistance is provided to students as they attempt to enter the work force. To address these problems which contribute to the chronic unemployment of adults with disabilities, comprehensive transition models are needed that will enable individuals with disabilities to avoid the trap of long-term unemployment and dependence on federal financial subsidies.

The remainder of this article describes one such demonstration model in operation at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) through assistance provided by the U.S. Department of Education. Referred to as the **Employment Connection** model, the program is made up of six components. It is designed to allow students to self-identify their desire for assistance and support at any time during their academic experience. However, recruitment and awareness activities are included to allow students to obtain assistance as early in their academic careers as possible. The model encompasses the individual's academic program, individualized support provided through a college or university's office of special student services, employment opportunities while in school, assistance in job placement provided by both the university's career planning and placement and alumni offices, and post-employment follow-along services delivered in conjunction with other state or local rehabilitation and employment agencies. The model is designed to make maximum use of existing university and community-based services. Unique features of the model include (1) the application of transition planning and person-centered planning techniques to the needs of students in post-secondary educational settings, (2) the involvement of university alumni and local employers in providing work experience and jobs for graduates, and (3) the provision of post-placement follow-along services to facilitate the transfer of learner accommodations from the academic to the employment settings. The specific components of the model are identified and described in detail in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1 -- COMPONENTS OF THE COMPREHENSIVE TRANSITION MODEL

Developing Individualized Career Plans

Identifying Effective Learner Accommodations within the Student's Academic Program

Providing Work Experience Opportunities Through Mentorships, Cooperative Education, and Internships

Providing Direct Assistance in the Job Placement Process

Providing Post-Employment Follow-Along Services to Insure Transfer of Learner Accommodations from the Academic to the Employment Setting

Identifying and Obtaining Other Needed Services and Supports

Developing an Individualized Career Plan

As documented previously, many post-secondary students with disabilities participate in academic programs that bear little relationship to their stated career goals. Lack of support services, attitudinal and physical barriers, and other obstacles make it difficult for many students to pursue a program of study which leads directly to meaningful post-school employment. To address this situation, the Employment Connection model will focus its efforts on the development of individualized career plans for all students involved in the program.

To be maximally effective, the program must provide multiple points of access to individual students. Some students may enter the project after receiving services and becoming aware of the project through the Office of Special Student Services. Other students may not be receiving direct support from the Office of Special Student Services, yet may desire assistance from the Employment Connection program in order to access its work experience and job placement services. Some students may be involved in career planning activities from the first semester they enter school. Other students may wait until just prior to graduation, after having changed their program of study multiple times and recognizing the need for additional support as they approach the end of their educational program.

To accommodate these diverse scenarios, a number of different student recruitment strategies are utilized. The Office of Special Student Services will provide information directly to the 600 VCU students with disabilities served through the Office. The Student Support Organization for students with disabilities serves as an advisory group to the program and assists with awareness activities and recruitment among the population of VCU students who have not self-identified themselves to the Office of Special Student Services. The Offices of Career Planning and Placement and Cooperative Work Experience, as integral components of the overall program, are another point of entry for individual students. Finally, electronic bulletin board and student publications are also used to make students aware of available services. In this way, it is hoped that all students with disabilities will be notified of the project.

Students requesting assistance from the project will begin by developing Individualized Career Plans. The plans will be developed through a combination of techniques used to generate individualized transition plans for adolescents with disabilities in special education programs (Wehman, 1992) and "person-centered" plans for adults with disabilities (Mount, 1991). These techniques are based on a number of guiding principles. First, the plan should reflect the preferences and desires of the student, not the intentions or recommendations of staff members. Second, the plan should reflect the student's "ideal" post-school career, as opposed to limiting the student to what s/he or others feel is possible at the present time. Third, the plan should reflect re-sources and assistance that can be provided by a wide array of individuals - the student, his or her family, employers and community members, university offices, community service agencies, and others. Fourth, the plan should be updated regularly to reflect changes in the student's desires and needs.

The students who request participation in the Employment Connection program develop individualized plans in conjunction with staff from the VCU Office of Special Student Services and project staff. The major elements of the individualized career plans to be developed include:

1. Establishing a post-school career objective, which will become the focus of other plan activities and can be modified at any point in time;
2. Developing an academic course of study which directly leads to the attainment of the student's career objective;
3. Identifying effective learner accommodations in the academic setting that can be subsequently transferred to the employment setting;
4. Specifying one or more work experience opportunities prior to graduation, including mentorships, cooperative education placements, and internships;
5. Specifying potential job placement assistance, including services provided by the University Career Center, the Office of Alumni Activities, the Department of Rehabilitative Services, and other agencies, organizations, and individuals;
6. Identifying potential post-employment services, including but not limited to involvement by project staff in the transfer of learning accommodations to the work setting, provision of assistive technology, personal assistant or transportation services through the Department of Rehabilitative Services, and other supports as needed; and
7. Identifying other services and supports, including potential needs for assistance with residential services, independent living services, SSA work incentive programs, transportation, health care, and other services as needed.

When developed, the student uses the individualized career plan to guide his or her academic program, aid in identifying the accommodations and support most relevant to her or her immediate needs, and determining the types of pre-graduation work experiences that will allow him or

her to "build a resume" of successfu l employment experiences. The career plan can be subsequently updated at any time at the request of the student.

Identifying Effective Learner Accommodations Within the Student's Academic Program

Many other colleges and universities now possess excellent special student services programs that assist many students in developing learner accommodations, communicating with faculty members, and completing their academic programs. Staff from these offices may work with hundreds of students each year. Some students require assistance in arranging for interpreter services or physical adaptations. Other students benefit from intensive tutoring services. These offices also perform an advocacy function, working on behalf of individual students with faculty members and other university offices to help insure that students receive the opportunities and accommodations to which they are entitled under Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

For many students, much of the work of these offices focuses on the development of learning accommodations, particularly for students with learning disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, or neurologic disorders resulting in memory deficits. For these individuals, learner accommodations may include identification of compensatory strategies, cognitive orthotic mechanisms, and assistive technology devices. Staff work with individual students to develop notetaking strategies, individualized approaches to testing, studying strategies, use of personal computers and other aids, and specific techniques to enhance writing and oral presentation skills. The Employment Connection program builds on the strategies currently being developed for individual students by working with students and staff members to identify strategies which have ***the greatest potential for generalization to the post-school employment setting***.

Although significant progress has been made in developing learning accommodations and alternative strategies that will allow individuals with learning disabilities or memory disorders to achieve academic success, relatively little attention has been paid to the extent to which these strategies will translate, or generalize, to post-school employment settings. For example, while the strategy of tape recording classes and retyping notes as a mechanism for reinforcing key concepts may be directly transferable to employment situations in which an individual tape records staff meetings and transcribes key portions, in other situations the use of alternative response modes or testing formats may only transfer to some employment situations. The lack of effective learner accommodations which readily generalize to employment settings may ultimately limit the employment alternatives available to individual students.

In the field of rehabilitation, much work has been done to develop compensatory strategies and assistive technologies that aid individuals with disabilities in performing sophisticated jobs in the competitive work force. Of particular importance have been efforts to develop, demonstrate and disseminate a series of effective strategies and interventions designed to promote the generalization and transfer of job skills from vocational training environments to long-term employment settings (Kregel, Parent, & West, 1994; Kreutzer & Wehman, 1991). The Employment Connection program attempts to incorporate the identification of learner accommodations which will transfer from educational to employment settings by (1) encouraging students to consider the identification of these strategies while developing their individualized career plans, (2) initiating the development of learner accommodations that have proven effective in employment settings, and (3) transferring the use of effective compensatory strategies and assistive technologies through a sequential process of pre-graduation work experience, job placement, and post-placement assistance.

Over the past several years, a large number of compensatory strategies, learner accommoda-

tions, assistive technology devices, and other aids have been identified and shown to be effective in employment setting for adults with physical disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, and sensory disabilities. Major categories of effective approaches devices are identified below.

Task Restructuring: Task restructuring may be defined as the simplification, reorganization, or fragmentation of tasks or duties that presently comprise a specific job into a set of duties and tasks that fall into the range of abilities of the individual with a disability. In the employment sector, this approach is often viewed as separating those tasks viewed as **essential** to job performance from those that are **marginal** to job performance. Examples of task restructuring include combining duties from other jobs to create a new position, or trading off tasks that are outside the range of the consumer's abilities.

Task Modification: Task modification is usually defined as the development of alternative methods of completing tasks without an overall altering of job duties. In general, task modification is viewed as the development of non-traditional means of completing tasks that otherwise would be outside the consumer's range of abilities. Examples may include reordering the steps involved in a task to enable the individual to independently remember the steps while orienting throughout a large plant, office, hospital, etc., or redesigning the process used to complete a task to maximize components that can be performed with the aid of a computer, thereby increasing performance accuracy.

Adaptive Equipment: Adaptive equipment may be defined as the design, construction, and/or purchase of work aids or assistive devices that enhance an individual's performance of a work task or duty. Adaptive equipment may refer to such "low tech" items as pocket calculators, wrist timers, and planning calendars, or to more sophisticated "high tech" items such as speech synthesizing devices, voice recognition software, or "expert system" shells for specialized computer applications.

Environmental Accommodations: Environment accommodations refer to techniques designed to improve the overall accessibility of the work station or building. Obvious examples of environmental accommodations may include re-engineering work stations (raising height of work tables, widening doorways) to make them ergonomically for efficient. However, environmental accommodations can also refer to efforts to locate a worker to closer proximity to coworkers or supervisors, improving lighting, heating or other physical aspects of the work setting, or even incorporating strategies that make it possible for individuals to perform some or all of their duties from a home office, including maximizing the use of electronic mail and computer networking.

In the Employment Connection program, staff work constantly to insure the rapid technological advances occurring in business and industry are reflected in the educational experiences of students with disabilities. To capitalize on ongoing advances, program staff meet routinely with students and staff from the office of student support services to identify accommodations used to assist individuals in their academic programs which may also have direct applicability to the individual's ultimate post-school employment setting. In addition, staff work with students to aid them in communicating to their rehabilitation counselor, career planning and placement staff, and other relevant individuals their needs for post-school accommodations, as well as their rights to these accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act.

Providing Work Experience Opportunities Through Mentorships, Cooperative Education, and Internships

One of the problems faced by students with disabilities as they enter the workforce is frequently their lack of prior work experience. As a result of their disability, or often the result of others' perceptions of their disabilities, they have had a

difficult time obtaining employment prior to entering post-secondary school. Left unaddressed, lack of prior work experience presents several problems for students with disabilities. First, they may have a more difficult time selecting a career which matches their preferences and abilities. Second, they may have problems in developing a record of successful work experiences which can demonstrate their abilities to potential future employers through resumes and references. Third, they may be unable to specify the types of services and supports they will need to be successful in a future employment setting.

To address these shortcomings, it is imperative that students with disabilities have ample opportunities to acquire work experience prior to graduation that will enable them to confirm their career preferences, develop employment histories, and identify the possible services and supports, if any, that will maximize their opportunities for employment success. Specific steps should be taken to insure that a variety of work experience opportunities will be available to all students desiring these services prior to graduation. To effectively operate this type of program, a strong working relationship with the college or university's office of cooperative education and the office of alumni activities or relations. Through these entities, students with disabilities should have access to mentorships, cooperative education placements, and internships prior to graduation..

A **mentorship** is a short (two to twelve week experience) with an individual employer that enables the student to determine whether the activities and duties of a business or industry are consistent with his or her career goals. In other words, these experiences are designed to introduce the individual to the world of work and enable them to verify the appropriateness of their career objective.

A **cooperative education placement** is a long (one or more semester) placement designed to provide the student extended work experience. This type of experience can be used to complement the student's academic course of study, build up a record of work experience that can be used to enhance future job-seeking activities, and identify needed services and supports.

An **internship** is generally a one or two semester experience directly tied to an individual's academic program of study (such as a student teaching internship for education majors or a clinical internship for social work majors). These experiences are generally culminating activities that can be used to assess an individual's need for subsequent support services.

A unique aspect of the VCU Employment Connection program is that staff are available to go the work site during each of these three types of experiences to assess the student's need for job site accommodations, review the student accommodations already used in academic situations, identify student and employer preferences, and assist the student in designing and implementing effective interventions. Involving the alumni activities office in securing work experience sites greatly enhances the variety and relevance of the program. For example, representatives from the business community, contacted through the alumni office, can serve as members of a program's management team. Employers can be contacted to serve as mentors, and as sites for cooperative education and internship experiences. Employers can also assist in the job placement aspects of the program by providing information about potential job openings or other employment opportunities in the community. The end result of these activities to promote involvement of the business community is that it enhances the ability of a program to match employers who need skilled workers to students who need meaningful, long-term career opportunities.

Providing Direct Assistance in the Job Placement Process

Many students with disabilities will require little or no assistance as they complete their academic programs and enter the workforce. For those

students, their career plans may not reflect the need for specialized job placement assistance. Other students may benefit from the workshops and ongoing programs sponsored by a college or university's office of career planning and placement for the university community at large. For some individuals, specialized assistance may be required. It is important that each student have access to the amount of job placement assistance and support that they feel is necessary in order to attain their long-term career goals. Rather than having unwanted or unwelcomed assistance forced on them, it is important that specialized placement assistance be built into the student's self-directed individualized career plan. The range of job placement assistance and support options available to students participating in a comprehensive university-based employment preparation program could include:

Level 1: No specialized services and supports. Student obtains employment with no assistance from university or special program staff.

Level 2: Assistance provided by the college or university's career planning and placement office, including job-seeking and resume development workshops, career days, job posting electronic bulletin boards, etc.

Level 3: Specialized assistance as identified in the student's individualized career plan, including referral to and placement services provided by the state or local rehabilitation agency or other employment program available to all citizens of a state or locality.

Level 4: Specialized assistance provided by special program staff in collaboration with the office of alumni activities or relations and the office of career planning and placement.

Providing Post-Employment Follow-Along Services to Insure Transfer of Learner Accommodations from Academic to the Employment Setting

After participating in the activities described above, many individuals with disabilities will be able to successfully adjust to their initial post-graduate work experience with no need for further support. Other students, however, may indicate a need for post-employment follow-along services to assist their transition to the job site. The Employment Connection program emphasizes the provision of follow-up services to individuals after they have completed their academic program and entered the labor force. The intent of this follow-up assistance is to assist the former student in transferring accommodations proven successful in the academic setting to the long-term employment setting. It is during this initial period of training and adjustment that the implementation of compensatory strategies, the acquisition of assistive devices, and other accommodations can be useful in enhancing the individual's learning and promoting one's ability to perform independently at the job site. Adaptations and accommodations are never imposed on the employee or the supervisor. When designing a specific intervention, it is crucial the individual perceive the usefulness of the strategy and also direct staff in the design and implementation of supports or use of devices. Development and implementation of strategies usually occurs as the individual encounters difficulties in performing a new task or is able to meet quality or production standards. Table 2 on the following page describes the guidelines used in the development and design of work site accommodations.

Follow-up services should be based on the premise of providing all the support and assistance needed by an individual during the initial stages of employment and then fading that assistance over time as the individual indicates his or her comfort and satisfaction with the employment situation. Interventions should be unintrusive and not interfere with the relationship between the supervisor and the employee. Accommodations may be "high technology" (expert system shells, ergonomic design of work stations) or "low technology" (checklists,templates, etc.). Examples of frequently used accommodations are contained in Table 3.

Table 2

Guidelines Used in the Development of Work Site Accommodations

1. Review with the individual any learner accommodations they have used previously in academic or employment settings.
2. Assist the individual in meeting with his or her supervisor to discuss the use of any type of accommodation.
3. When possible, obtain the assistance of coworkers and supervisors in the design of job site accommodations.
4. Seek input on potential strategies to use in order to enhance current performance.
5. Recognize that some strategies may be used temporarily, to enable the individual to learn the job. Other strategies may be used permanently, to enable the individual to perform the job.
6. Recognize that the individual is responsible for all decisions regarding the design and use of job site accommodations. The role of the employment support specialist is to assist the individual throughout the decision-making process.

Table 3

Examples of Work Site Accommodations

Location Aids
(e.g., building maps, reference manuals, resource guides)

Portable Cue Devices
(e.g., templates of routine forms, letter folding protocol, task analyses, code books, notes.

Electronic Cue Devices
(e.g., timers, synchronized lights, beepers, computer-generate messages, etc.)

Visual Enhancements
(e.g., enlarged print directories, task analysis)

Audio Enhancements
(e.g., telephone volume controls, etc.)

Motor Skills Enhancements
(e.g., bowls for paper clips, rubber finger tips, handles, electronic staplers, etc.)

Assistive Appliances
(e.g., modified tools, fabricated tools, specially designed, orthopedic chairs, wooden/plastic/ plexiglass templates, separators, etc.)

Mobility Aids
(e.g., wheelchair tables, ramps, etc.)

Protective Devices
(e.g., elbow/knee pads, etc.)

In the Employment Connection program, an employment support specialist is responsible for providing follow-up services to individuals after they have completed their academic program and obtained employment. The specialist arranges with graduates the type of contact they would like to have after they enter employment. During the initial stages of employment, the specialist works with students to identify any assistance they may need to perform a new task they have been given or to meet quality or production standards. The implementation of compensatory strategies, the acquisition of assistive devices, and other accommodations can be critical at this point in their employment for enhancing the graduate's learning or ability to perform independently at the job site. The design and implementation of all strategies are directed by the graduate. The employment specialist solicits feedback from graduates to insure that the contacts do not interfere with the relationship between the employee and the supervisor.

The specialist provides varying levels of support to graduates depending on their specific needs. Most services will be provided by the specialist during the graduate's initial stages of employment and then fade assistance over time as the individual indicates his or her comfort and satisfaction with the employment situation. In addition, the specialist assists the individual in making contact

with community organizations and service agencies that provide assistance and support throughout the course of the individual's employment.

Identifying and Obtaining Other Needed Services and Supports

For many individuals with disabilities, the major obstacles which impede their ability to obtain and maintain employment have little to do with their actual ability to perform the job duties and tasks (Kregel, Parent, & West, 1994). Too frequently, difficulties experienced by individuals in other areas of their lives (transportation, health care, etc.) unnecessarily impede an individual's work performance. Unreliable transportation, lack of accessible or affordable housing, a need for personal assistance services, or many other factors may complicate the employment situation.

Most individuals with disabilities are able to effectively advocate and obtain needed services and supports on their own behalf. Other individuals, however, may be unaware of the services and supports available or be unable to access those supports. To address this issue, extensive efforts will be made during the development of the individualized career plans to identify all needed services and supports, not just those related to an individual's employment situation. Supports may focus on a variety of different areas.

Transportation - Assistance may be needed in accessing specialized, door-to-door transportation services, acquiring vehicular modifications to allow the individual to operate a motor vehicle, obtaining driver's education, arranging car pools, or other transportation alternatives.

Housing - Assistance may be needed in obtaining affordable and accessible housing options, financial assistance to pay for housing costs, home modifications, and other services.

Financial Assistance - Many individuals with disabilities may be receiving SSI or SSDI benefits at the time they enter employment. Assistance may be needed in accessing and using available work incentives that allow the individual to maximize their personal income while participating in these programs.

Independent Living Services - Services that can be provided through a Center for Independent Living (CIL) include peer counseling to assist the individual in obtaining all needed services and supports, training in a variety of independent living skills, and information and referral services.

Medical Assistance - Assistance may be needed in enabling individuals to access available medical assistance, obtain supplemental health insurance, or other services.

Assistive Technology - Assistance may be needed to allow individuals to become aware of available assistive technology devices, evaluate the relative utility of various devices, and then selecting and securing devices which may aid in their employment and independent living settings.

Personal Assistance Service - Assistance may be needed in identifying the need for a personal assistant, determining eligibility for a particular personal assistant program, hiring, supervising and evaluating the personal assistant, and funding personal assistant services.

To obtain the needed support services, the employment support specialist and the individual may need to contact a variety of federal, state, and local agencies. These agencies may include the state rehabilitation agency, the Social Security Administration, the local housing development authority, the local mental health/developmental disabilities service program, and the local or regional Center for Independent Living. All available resources should be contacted and accessed as needed to provide supports identified in individualized career plans.

CONCLUSION

Increasing numbers of individuals with disabilities are seeking advanced educational

opportunities beyond high school. Much of the focus of these students' transition has been on entering post-secondary institutions and managing college requirements. Now is the time to focus attention on the "third stage" of the transition process - exiting college and entering a meaningful, self-chosen full-time job with benefits. As many graduates with disabilities too often learn in the face of significant employment barriers, earning a college degree does not guarantee employment.

The Employment Connection model attempts to build on the essential elements of career development and planning for adolescents and adults with disabilities. It emphasizes student control of the career planning process and maximizes the use of existing college or university services and community supports. The model stresses several key components, including (1) student direction and choice, (2) continuous career planning throughout each student's academic experience, (3) extensive involvement of employers in the planning process, and (4) coordination of university and community services designed to effectively meet the employment preparation needs of individuals with disabilities.

Today's college graduates face significant challenges as they prepare to enter the world of work. Economic restructuring, as evidenced by widespread corporate downsizing, changing work force demands, and increased global competition make it difficult for college graduates to leave higher education secure in the knowledge that they will be able to engage in lifelong employment relationships with a single employment. Faced with the expectation that they may need to change jobs and employers many times throughout their careers, today's graduates must be fully equipped to plan and direct their long-term careers.

The unique challenges faced by graduates with disabilities, including low expectations and negative attitudes of employers, may lead to a need for specialized services and support to enhance the long-term employment potential. To be most effective, these services and supports must be provided in the context of person-centered planning techniques, which focus on students' goals, and the development of an individualized career plan, with outcome oriented objectives specifying the strategies needed to assist students in moving from an academic to employment setting.

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Abstract

This article presents an argument that transition teams must actively work with students with disabilities to promote their success in postsecondary education. Successful transition planning for postsecondary education extends beyond meeting the academic requirements for admission. Planning efforts must also include direct skills instruction in self-advocacy, independent living, decision making, and working with students to identify career goals. Three primary areas of consideration stand out when creating a plan which promotes independence and responsibility within students as they prepare for postsecondary education: exploring postsecondary education environments, identifying skills needed by students for a successful transition, and identifying the family's role in promoting the skills of self-advocacy and independence.

MAKING THE POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION MATCH: A ROLE FOR TRANSITION PLANNING

By: Sharon deFur, Elizabeth E. Getzel, & Kathy Trossi

Employment demands of the future will require additional training beyond secondary school, but will not necessarily require a four year degree. Nonetheless, the secondary education culture in the United States continues to promote attendance at a four year college as the primary transition outcome for all students. Students receive strong messages about the value of taking courses preparing them for college versus participating in non-college bound programs (Hudecki, 1995). Students with disabilities and their families, who receive transition planning assistance through the special education program, receive conflicting messages: the school and community culture promotes a focus on postsecondary education graduation outcomes, and the special education transition culture promotes a focus on employment outcomes. Special education transition planning concentrates energy in promoting successful employment decisions (Wehman, 1996). To assist youths with disabilities in postsecondary education deci-sions and planning, the process depends to a great extent on the generic postsecondary planning activities offered to the general school population. At a minimum, these activities include meeting with a school's guidance counselor to discuss career interests, identify potential postsecondary schools and their requirements for admission, and obtain information about the application process.

Educators, families, and agencies may assume that if students are academically capable of participating in postsecondary education, collaborative planning and preparation to assist the student in meeting the demands of a postsecondary setting is not needed. The experiences of countless numbers of adolescents and young adults show that this is an erroneous assumption, one that actually contributes to the likelihood that a youth with a disability will not complete his or her post-secondary education training. In the past, transition experts used this predictable outcome of non-completion to argue for vocational training in secondary education for students with disabilities. While this argument may remain valid, perhaps there is a compatible argument for improved preparation and matching of students to their postsecondary education environment.

Students with disabilities do not participate in postsecondary education at the same rate, at least initially, as other students exiting secondary programs. National longitudinal follow-up data find that only 14% of youth with disabilities attended a postsecondary school during the first two years after exiting high school, compared to 53% of the general population (Wagner, D'Amico, Marder, Newman, & Blackorby, 1992). Interestingly, three to five years after leaving school, the percentage of students with disabilities attending postsecondary schools increases to 26%. However, in analyzing retention rates, only 12% of individuals with disabilities have received some type of degree three to five years after high school as compared to 18% of the general population who completed a postsecondary education program six years after

their sophomore year in high school (Wagner et al., 1992). One might conclude that many students without disabilities do not complete their post-secondary program, but the likelihood of earning a degree is decreased by the presence of a disability.

The relative lack of successful participation in postsecondary settings by individuals with disabilities warrants increased attention by transition planning teams to carefully prepare students with disabilities for success in two or four year postsecondary settings. A study of transition Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) found that almost half of all students with disabilities in secondary education in Virginia identify college or community college as a transition goal (Virginia Department of Education, 1994). Another 25% identified training in a trade or proprietary school. Clearly, students with disabilities see post-secondary education as a viable transition option.

In the Virginia study, transition planning teams reported that at least half of these students will need some support in postsecondary education (Virginia Department of Education, 1994). Support services frequently identified were personal assistant services, individual counseling, and financial and medical support. Table 1 lists supports most frequently reported as needed. It is not clear what transition planning teams address as appropriate goals and objectives for secondary special education that would prepare these students for the postsecondary education experience. It is highly probable that completion of academic requirements is the primary objective of such planning. For example, seldom do IEP transition planning teams predict that these students will need instruction or community experiences relevant to adult or independent living skills (Virginia Department of Education, 1994).

A follow-along study of students with disabilities found participation in relevant transition planning to be a strong predictor of participation in postsecondary education (Halpern, Yovanoff, Doren, & Benz, 1995). This study also found that student satisfaction with his or her high school instruction was a very powerful predictor of postsecondary education participation. Even though we have a greater understanding about the participation of students with disabilities in postsecondary schools and potential predictors for their participation, there still remain considerable issues and concerns about how well these students are prepared to manage their education beyond high school.

Table 1

Percentage of Students Needing Additional Postschool Supports

Support	Percentage Needing Service
Personal Assistance Services	4.5
Medicaid	14.1
Medicare	5.9
Individual Counseling	14.8
Social Security Income	17.3

This article presents an argument that transition teams must actively work with students with disabilities to promote their success in postsecondary education. Successful transition planning for postsecondary education extends beyond meeting the academic requirements for admission. Planning efforts must also include direct skills instruction in self-advocacy, independent living, decision making, and working with students to identify career goals to help students establish a career and make future choices for education and training (Aune, 1991; Sitlington & Frank, 1990). Three primary areas of consideration stand out when creating a plan which promotes independence and responsibility within students as they prepare for postsecondary education: exploring postsecondary education environments,

identifying skills needed by students for a successful transition, and identifying the family's role in promoting skills of self-advocacy and independence.

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION ENVIRONMENTS

The first and frequently overlooked step in determining an appropriate postsecondary education match is identifying the demands of a postsecondary education setting and where youth and young adults with disabilities are more likely to fail. Naturally, there are the academic skill expectations upon which secondary education and special education exert much of its preparatory effort. Meeting the academic acceptance criteria for a particular postsecondary setting is considered evidence of an appropriate *academic* match. However, the implicit curriculum of postsecondary education presents the greater difficulty and complicates the match of the individual to the setting. In this article, implicit curriculum is defined as those academic expectations that are unwritten, but are a part of the culture of that setting. Examples of implicit academic expectations are: learning in large classes with little individual attention; following instructors who move at a fast pace; studying independently; monitoring one's own progress; managing one's time and work plans; deciding whether to attend class or not; seeking diagnostic support or strategies from professors; and requesting accommodations without prompting (Samberg, Barr, Hartman, & Murray, 1994). Essentially, the implied expectations are that postsecondary students control their own learning and participation in the learning process.

Some of the demands of the postsecondary education community can challenge all young adults; however, for youth with disabilities, controlling their own learning may be one of the largest obstacles these students face. Although legislation has made postsecondary education available to students with disabilities, availability does not ensure access (Siperstein, 1988) or success in a chosen program of study. Many postsecondary education students with disabilities participate in academic programs that bear little relationship to their stated career goals. Lack of support services, attitudinal and physical barriers, and other obstacles make it difficult for many students to pursue a program of study that leads directly to meaningful employment.

Perhaps one of the most significant barriers which still remains a part of a student's postsecondary experience is the lack of awareness or insensitivity of instructors and professors to the service needs and rights of students with disabilities (West, Kregel, Getzel, Zhu, Ipsen, & Martin, 1993; Tindall & Gugerty, 1990). Some reasons for these attitudes stem from instructors' lack of information and knowledge of how to assist students in their courses. In a survey of instructors at two-year technical training institutions, Tindall and Gugerty (1990) found that instructors needed more information about what is considered reasonable accommodation in the classroom, information about support services (that is, who to refer, how to refer, and where to refer), and information on how to vary curricula to meet the needs of students with disabilities. These instructors were also unsure whether developing classroom accommodations gave an unrealistic view of the ability of students with disabilities to become competitively employed. They also expressed doubt about the availability of jobs for students with disabilities after they receive training. Similar attitudes were reported by students with disabilities in the study conducted by West and colleagues (1993). As one student stated, "My instructors think if I can't manage without extra help, I can't manage in the real world." (p.462). The issue still remains that no matter how much students know about their rights and are prepared to discuss their accommodation

needs with instructors, all too frequently, post-secondary institutions give priority to rules established by instructors in their classrooms over the legal rights of these students (West et al., 1993). For example, one student commented, "They left it up to me to work out a solution with professors. When we couldn't come to an agreement, I didn't bother contacting the services again. I don't want to force my professors to do something they wouldn't agree to with me, it would make me uncomfortable." (p.462)

In contrast, secondary special education provides accommodations, but all too often does not actively include students in determining their learning needs and goals, or in the evaluation of their progress (Van Reusen, 1994). As a result students can become "passive learners" -- meaning they are not actively involved in the learning process (Torgeson, 1982; Izzo, Pritz, & Ott, 1990). Such passive behavior or "learned helplessness" (Seligman, 1975) does not enable the development of the perseverance or the sense of independence critical to success in adulthood, nor does it foster the development of individual problem solving important for self-determination and self-advocacy.

Often the greater challenge to success in postsecondary education settings for all students is adjusting to different social and independent living demands, or establishing a school social life as well as performing independent living tasks as maintaining finances, clothing, food, and other personal needs. Students will be faced with new social expectations and a different support network when entering a postsecondary setting (Shaw, Brinckerhoff, Kistler, & McGuire, 1991). Assuming that students with disabilities whose primary transition goal is entering postsecondary education do not require preparation to meet these social and independent living demands, or that the IEP team should not consider these demands when helping youth and their families plan for the postsecondary setting, represents an unfortunate error in IEP team decision making.

MEETING THE DEMANDS OF POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Attempting to adapt to a postsecondary environment without adequate preparation can leave students feeling overwhelmed and unable to complete their program. Effective planning and preparation are needed (Wille-Gregory, Graham, & Hughes, 1995) which include learning those skills necessary to deal with both academic and social challenges presented by postsecondary environments. Without this training, students will not be provided the framework for planning their post-secondary education within the context of enhancing students' self-determination, self-evaluation, identification of post-school transition goals, and selection of appropriate educational experiences (Halpern, 1994). To ensure that students with disabilities learn as much as they can about a postsecondary education setting to make an informed decision about whether the school is a good match for them, the transition team should work with students and families to use a variety of methods to obtain information. Table 2 below provides a summary of suggested activities that students and families can use.

Table 2

Suggested Activities for Obtaining Information About Postsecondary Education Settings

▸ Explore variety of postsecondary options. Postsecondary education can include trade or business schools, vocational-technical schools, universities, and colleges.
▸ Review information about schools, looking at training or coursework offered, diversity and size of student body, and the school's community (both academic and social environments).

(continued)

▸ Visit potential schools and find out about available support services and the school's physical accessibility.
▸ Talk to students with disabilities attending postsecondary programs about their experiences.
▸ Develop a list of the school's advantages and disadvantages to determine if it meets the student's academic, social, and emotional needs.

(Adapted from Wille-Gregory et al., 1995; HEATH Resource Center, 1989.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT IN TRANSITION PLANNING

Developmentally, the characteristics of adolescents and young adults challenge the notion that we can improve the preparation of these individuals to match the implicit curriculum demands of postsecondary education settings. These youth and young adults are seeking independence from adults and family; they are often stubborn in their approach to life and decisions; and often believe that adults do not really understand what they want or need. These characteristics interfere with taking advice from adults or educators and graduation from high school represents an opportunity to shed the label associated with special education or being different. Conformity and "fitting in" represent the desired persona of most college freshmen. Counteracting the tendency to conform requires a will-power and maturity that few young adults possess. However, young adults with disabilities may have to announce their differences to gain accommodations and resist conforming to social expectations of the postsecondary community to manage their disability. Consequently, society may be asking students with disabilities to act in ways that are developmentally mature beyond the norm, when in fact they have had fewer opportunities to take part in decision-making and learning from positive and negative consequences than their peers who are not disabled (Bannerman, Sheldon, Sherman, & Harchik, 1990; Guess & Siegel-Causey, 1985; Kishi, Teelucksingh, Zollers, Park-Lee & Meyer, 1988). This represents a systemic problem and poses a question to special education and rehabilitation policies and services. Should professionals focus on changing or enhancing the individuals' skills, changing the systems to respond to individual needs, or some combination of both?

Young adults without disabilities also flounder in meeting the challenges of postsecondary education which involve increased independence, requiring greater self-discipline, and self-management (Shaw et al., 1991), but, more often, these young adults have the resources to recover from this floundering. Perhaps these common transition experiences promote movement to the next stage of maturity in the general population, and to some degree for students with disabilities. But when the challenges are imbedded in the disability or characteristics associated around that disability, without adequate resources or skills, the young adult with the disability remains disadvantaged.

IMPORTANCE OF SELF-DETERMINATION IN TRANSITION TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Self-awareness, self-advocacy, and autonomy contribute to feelings of self-determination (West, Barcus, Brooke, & Rayfield, 1995). Self-determination skills can encompass a number of psychological and behavioral attributes including goal-setting, choice, creativity, and independence (Deci, 1980; Ames & Ames, 1985; Durlak, Rose, & Bursuck, 1994). These skills can be particularly helpful to youth entering postsecondary education (Durlak et al., 1994). Students with disabilities who have successfully made the transition to

postsecondary schools exhibited: 1) an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses both academically and socially in addition to compensatory strategies, 2) an ability to discuss their accommodation needs with faculty and staff, 3) an awareness of services and supports available to them, and 4) an ability to access information, services, or supports when needed (Aune, 1991; Bursuck & Rose, 1991; Durlak, 1992; & Siperstein, 1988).

Studies of successful adults with learning disabilities find that perseverance and the ability to reframe a situation, enabling the individual to overcome a potential obstacle, accounted for their success in facing and overcoming challenges presented by their disability (Gerber & Reiff, 1994). Conceivably then, the key to adult success, and perhaps success for young adults with disabilities in postsecondary education settings, lies within the individual degree of self-determination.

This hypothesis, in conjunction with our knowledge of adolescent and young adult development, reinforces the importance and demands the inclusion of children and youth as active participants in their own education planning. Unfortunately, students with disabilities are often unaware of the goals established in their IEPs or see little relevance to their education and future goals (Lovitt, Cushing, & Stump, 1994; Morningstar, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 1996). Active participation in the IEP is, therefore, essential to the development of skills of self-determination both by the meeting itself as well as the goals and services developed as a result of the IEP. The IEP process offers the youth an opportunity to practice applying skills of self-advocacy and choice in a safe environment and it provides an opportunity for the youth to develop an awareness of his or her strengths and needs. Each of these is critical to developing self-determination. Exercising personal choice options also empowers and enhances a willingness to persevere. Table 3 provides suggested areas for developing or increasing students' self-determination skills.

Table 3

Developing Self-Determination Skills Through the IEP Process

▸ Provide opportunities for students to learn about their strengths, needs, and interests.
▸ Provide opportunities for students to practice self-advocacy skills, for example, discussing modifications on IEPs with mainstreamed teachers.
▸ Develop "mock" IEP meetings to provide students the opportunity to understand the meeting process, who attends, and their role in discussing what is included on their plan.
▸ Assist students in developing a summary sheet of their interests, strengths, and choices to discuss at the IEP meeting.

Project SMOOTH, Chesterfield, County Public Schools, 1994

Opportunities to develop these self-determination skills prior to entering postsecondary education settings offer youths with disabilities the advantage of information and maybe even maturity, that they will need to address academic and social demands of the postsecondary education community. Students who understand themselves and their disability, and have the confidence to act in their own best interests, can then make choices with full knowledge and understanding of the impact of those choices.

Youth with disabilities need to consider the personal match to a postsecondary environment that will support their developing self-determination skills. To do this requires investigating the social and academic expectations and evaluating their ability to respond. IEP teams can help formulate questions to evaluate postsecondary settings.

SETTING CAREER GOALS FOR SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION PLANNING

It has been suggested that a number of college students with disabilities have high career aspirations, but have low expectations of ever accomplishing these goals (Babbitt & Burbach, 1990). These authors theorize that students with disabilities may have greater uncertainty about their career choice than their peers without disabilities. These students may be uncertain about their strengths and limitations and how these fit with different career choices. With postsecondary education as the primary transition goal, secondary transition planning may neglect the attention needed for career guidance. Career guidance services for students as they move through the transition planning process can help them to better understand what postsecondary options can best meet their needs. Career planning of individuals with disabilities requires a partnership between the student, education, and community-based services, including vocational rehabilitation.

School counselors hold an important role as a member of the transition team. Data collected from IEP transition meetings in Virginia revealed that guidance counselors attended 25% of the meetings and were involved with an additional 10% of the students outside of the transition meeting (Virginia Department of Education, 1994). Guidance counselors on the transition teams can help students with disabilities assess postsecondary opportunities. Without an overall context provided by a career objective, the transition team's ability may be limited in the identification of specific supports and services needed for students to achieve their goals (deFur, Getzel, & Kregel, 1994).

Another essential role that counselors play on the transition team is assisting special education staff in working with students to develop career goals and helping develop the framework for postsecondary education plans. Students with disabilities have similar career development needs as their peers without disabilities. However, students with disabilities have additional factors which need to be considered during the career development process (Ettinger, 1995). Some of the issues which counselors can assist students explore include:

1. Disclosing a disability -- Students need to discuss what they think about this issue and how they will deal with it once they have entered school. Students need to explore their comfort level with disclosing their disability and what methods would be best for them (Ettinger, 1995), for example, seeking assistance from the special services office on campus or speaking directly to the instructor on their own.

2. Understanding one's disability -- Students with disabilities must be able to understand their strengths and how their disability impacts their learning (Wille-Gregory et al, 1995). It is important that students are able to effectively communicate their specific support needs. This can be achieved when students are able to be an active participant in their career planning process and are provided opportunities to explain their learning difficulties in the educational setting (Wille-Gregory, et al, 1995).

3 Exploring career goals -- Students with disabilities often lack exposure to the variety of career options and the skills that are required. Students with disabilities need to have work experience during high school to help develop social interaction skills and to further explore vocational interests (Reiff, Ginsberg, & Gerber, 1995). These opportunities will assist students in better determining their postschool goals and what type of postsecondary education setting can best meet their needs.

4. Learning about technology available to students--Students with disabilities need access to information about assistive technology and

services. By utilizing these supports, students should explore what opportunities are available to participate in advanced courses or training (Bireley, Landers, Vernooy, & Schlaerth, 1986).

Other team members who are critical for effective transition planning are community representatives, such as individuals involved in the job training, or representatives from community college and vocational schools. These representatives are not generally present at transition planning meetings (deFur, Getzel, & Kregel, 1994). If students are considering attending a college or vocational program near their home community, representatives from postsecondary programs can provide an important link to these education environments and can assist the transition team members in their planning process. For example, by working together, educators and community organization representatives can monitor the need for various types of postschool services and determine how best to meet these needs.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT IN TRANSITION PLANNING FOR POSTSECONDARY ENVIRONMENTS

At one time, families continued to have parental rights while young adults participated in postsecondary education settings. They received grades, bills, notices of suspension, probation, and calls when their children were not performing well, either academically or socially. Postsecondary institutions assumed a role of *in loco parentis*. Individuals are now considered adults at the age of 18, the common age of entry into postsecondary education and family rights are transferred to the young adult. Many families find this surprising as their children enter college or community college.

For families of young adults with disabilities, who have, more often than not, maintained an involved caretaking role throughout adolescence, this change often comes as a big shock. In addition, our special education system and educational entitlements have provided a system of educational support for most of the child's school career. Facing both of these endings is often a challenge for families of young adults with disabilities.

In choosing postsecondary education settings, families have a major role. Families are influential in helping their children determine career and lifestyle options (Morningstar, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 1996). Family history (where parents or other family members attended), finances, achievement expectations, and perceptions of the degree of independence that their child possesses all play into the influence on postsecondary education choices for all students. For students with disabilities, the IEP process becomes a time for exploring what postsecondary education setting would best meet their specific needs. Preparing their child to face the challenges of a postsecondary setting (i.e. greater expectations to achieve independently and changes in the level of support from family and friends) has not, in all likelihood, been a major focus of attention for families. Choosing college or a technical school as a desired postsecondary outcome takes on new implications for families of youth with disabilities and the role they have in promoting success in those environments.

Given the argument presented earlier, families of youths with disabilities going to college will need to adopt the attitude of promoting skills of self-determination and perseverance for their son or daughter at home and at school. Families frequently take on the role of advocate for their son or daughter; transferring this role to the son or daughter becomes imperative for achieving success in postsecondary education environments. For example, choice and decision making could be incorporated in all aspects of a student's life, both in the school and at home, including decisions about classes to take, schedules, after-school

activities, clothing, and meals (West, Gibson, Unger, 1996). This will allow students to take more responsibility for everyday activities and to experience positive or negative results of their choices.

Families and students need to develop an understanding of how student support services function in postsecondary settings in general and, when known, in the anticipated setting for the student with a disability. In secondary special education, the IEP has power and commands compliance; few postsecondary student support services have that level of influence over autonomously functioning departments and faculty. While Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disability Act carry weight in offering access to programs and providing reasonable accommodations, they do not represent the entitlement associated with IDEA. Once a student transitions from secondary school to a postsecondary setting, a major shift in responsibility for such issues as identification of a disability, assessment, programming, advocacy, decision making and transition planning occurs. In secondary schools, the responsibility for addressing these issues are primarily the responsibility of the school and in some instances the school and parent. Once the student enters a postsecondary setting, the responsibility shifts to the student (Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, 1992).

Regardless of the decisions made about special education at the secondary level, families and students need to understand the differences in the educational and social demands of high school and postsecondary settings; then families and IEP transition planning teams can collaboratively develop goals, objectives, and services that meet students' individual needs and long range education goals. Approaches used through person centered planning should be considered in the IEP planning process to enhance student and family involvement (Morningstar et al., 1996).

CONCLUSION

Increasingly, students with disabilities in high school are identifying postsecondary education as a desired outcome. Nationally, almost 6% of the undergraduate student population reported having a disability (Henderson, 1995). These numbers are encouraging signs that students with disabilities are viewing postsecondary education as a means for career preparation. However, there are also signs indicating low retention and completion rates of students once they enter postsecondary schools. As we continue to learn more about students with disabilities who are seeking postsecondary education opportunities and their transition needs, we must carefully examine the primary influences or factors which can lead to greater numbers of students successfully completing their programs. By focusing on how we can enhance student participation in postsecondary education through a planning process which focuses on assisting a student to identify his or her appropriate match, it is hoped that the results will be greater completion rates, resulting in increased opportunities to work in their chosen careers.

Successful transition planning for postsecondary education extends beyond making an appropriate academic skills match. Matching the demands of the implicit academic and social curriculum with the level of student self-determination or independence must also occur. When students and families identify college as the primary transition outcome goal, IEP teams must also consider actions that promote student perseverance and tenacity to meet the challenges of postsecondary education. Although many post-secondary education institutions are increasing the attention and support given to students with disabilities, success in these settings, for the most part, remains dependent on the individual qualities of

the student. This does not mean that postsecondary education institutions do not have a continuing responsibility to work with students to ensure access to needed supports and services. Postsecondary education institutions should take a stronger role in educating instructors regarding disabilities and students' rights to course modifications and other accommodations (West et al., 1993).

Matching students with disabilities and postsecondary settings should consider the degree of self-determination possessed by the student in comparison with the demands and available supports of the anticipated setting. In collaboration with families and students, secondary special education transition planning for postsecondary education can create the learning environments and opportunities that develop these qualities. The secondary special education experience must reflect an increasing emphasis on student independence and accountability as part of the preparation for postsecondary education.

Implementing this new paradigm into transition planning may be met with resistance by teachers, families, and students. Assumptions about secondary education's relationship to preparation for the college experience and careers, assumptions about the intensity of support appropriate for secondary students with disabilities in the general curriculum, and assumptions about the ability of postsecondary education programs to accommodate disabilities will have to be challenged. If students with disabilities are going to successfully meet the demands of the postsecondary education experience and the increasing expectations of secondary and postsecondary education, then special education cannot continue a focus on the current practices of dependency. The development of models which encourage family-student-school partnerships are needed which emphasize self-determination for students (Morningstar et al, 1996). Self-advocacy means knowing your rights and your responsibilities. As we help students with disabilities prepare for postsecondary education, we must remember to help them develop their sense of responsibility along with their other skills. This paradigm shift can be promoted by proactive transition planning discussions for youths with disabilities where a successful match to postsecondary education is the primary transition goal.

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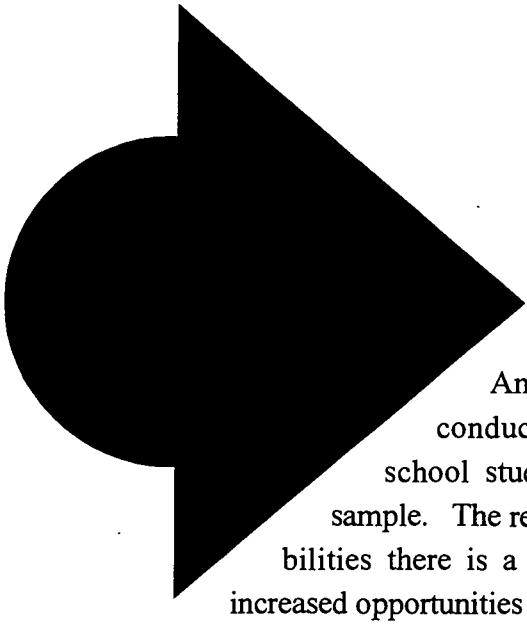

Abstract

An analysis of transition plans for students with disabilities was conducted across 24 school divisions in Virginia. Eighty-four public school students, ages 14-21, with significant disabilities, comprised the sample. The results indicate that for a majority of students with significant disabilities there is a need for greater participation in the planning of their future, increased opportunities to access employment prior to exiting school, and access to a range of services to provide ongoing and long-term support in the community.

TRANSITION PLANNING FOR STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT-CENTERED PLANNING

By: Elizabeth E. Getzel & Sharon deFur

Recent studies focusing on post-school outcomes of students with significant disabilities have contributed to a better understanding about the challenges they face in accessing employment, post-secondary education, living arrangements, and social/recreational activities (Edgar, 1986; Edgar, Levine, Levine, & Dubey, 1988; Haring & Lovett, 1990; Hasazi, Gordon, & Roe, 1985; Sitlington, Frank, & Carson, 1991; Thurlow, Bruininks, Wolman, & Steffens, 1989; Wehman, Kregel, & Seyfarth, 1985) . Unfortunately, investigations of the post-school outcomes of students with significant disabilities paint a disturbing picture of chronic unemployment, dependence on family members and service providers, and isolation from the regular daily activities of the community (Johnson, McGrew, Bloomberg, Bruininks, & Lin, 1996). Yet, a tremendous amount of information is available to show that the potential of individuals with significant disabilities is much greater than once was believed (Lakin, Braddock, Smith, & West, 1994; 1995).

Almost all students with disabilities encounter some problems as they make the transition from school to adult life. However, students with significant disabilities such as autism, severe or profound mental disabilities, or multiple disabilities have a particularly difficult time entering integrated, independent settings after exiting school. For example, Wehman, Kregel and Seyfarth (1985) investigated the post-school outcomes of individuals with moderate and severe mental retardation in four diverse school systems in Virginia. Unemployment rates for these individuals ranged from 85%-90%. In addition, the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Students in Special Education (Wagner, 1993) has tracked the outcomes of more than 8,000 youths with disabilities since 1985. Results to date have indicated that 73% of individuals with multiple disabilities and 73.3% of individuals with orthopedic impairments were not employed in 1987 or 1990. Furthermore, only 13.4% of individuals with multiple disabilities and 38% of individuals with orthopedic impairments were living independently three to five years after exiting secondary special education programs.

Over the past ten years, significant progress has been made in the development and implementation of comprehensive transition programs in many school districts throughout the nation (Syzmanski & Parker, 1995; Wehman, 1996). Transition is a multidimensional process that involves preparation at the high school level, the availability of appropriate post-school services and supports, and a student-centered planning process that enables students to pursue careers and lifestyles that meet their personal needs and preferences. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Division on Career Development and Transition has developed a definition of transition which reflects various dimensions of this process. It reads:

Transition refers to a change in status from behaving primarily as a student to assuming emergent adult roles in the community. These roles include employment, participating in post-secondary education, maintaining a home, becoming appropriately involved in the community, and experiencing satisfactory personal and social relationships. The process of enhancing transition involves the participation and coordination of school programs, adult agency services, and natural supports within the community... Transition planning should begin no later than age 14, and students should be encouraged, to the full extent of their capabilities, to assume a maximum amount of responsibility for such planning.

(Halpern, 1994, p.116)

The CEC definition emphasizes three major themes which have direct relevance to the design and implementation of transition services for individuals with significant disabilities, including (1) the student's role in choosing a career and developing a transition plan, (2) employment as a primary post-school outcome for all students with disabilities, and (3) the availability of needed community supports that allow the student to participate in multiple community settings. Although improved transition services are allowing a large number of individuals to successfully move into satisfying and meaningful adult lives, many students with significant disabilities have yet to benefit from the advances that have been made (Wehman, Hess, & Kregel, 1996; West, Mast, Cosel & Cosel, 1996).

Student Involvement in Transition Planning

Both the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (P.L. 101-476) and the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 (P.L. 102-596) emphasize that students with disabilities should be actively involved in planning their transition from school to work and directing their own careers. The importance placed on self-determination and self-advocacy in the literature on transition for students with severe disabilities (Guess, Benson, & Siegel-Causey, 1985; Wehmeyer, 1982, West & Parent, 1992) reflects the underlying belief that the acquisition of such skills and attitudes promotes more successful post-school outcomes and improved quality of life (Brown & Gothelf, 1996). However, most of the research in this area has focused on students with mild and moderate disabilities. Efforts to promote the involvement of students with significant disabilities in transition planning have received relatively little attention. Educators, faced with the IDEA requirements of involving students with significant disabilities in their transition planning, struggle to identify ways to meaningfully relate current research to their students (Lehr & Brown, 1996). More often than not, educators and families may revert to their former roles of decision makers in the absence of active participation by the individual with a disability.

Concurrent with the emerging themes of self-determination and self-advocacy has been an increasing emphasis on the concept of person-centered planning. Person-centered planning emphasizes the development of program goals specific to the individual and the reflection of student preferences, desires and choices in the design and delivery of supports (O'Brien & Lovett, 1993; Smull & Harrison, 1992). Key components of the person-centered planning process include focusing on individual preferences as opposed to deficits or limitations, developing a "vision" of the lifestyle the individual prefers, the development of short- and long-term goals that will allow the individual to attain the desired lifestyle, and coordinating a network of informal and formal supports that are as self-sustaining as possible (Mount & Zwernik, 1988; Steere, Gregory, Heiny & Butterworth, 1995).

Employment as a Post-School Goal

In the not to distant past, many individuals with significant disabilities were viewed as incapable of engaging in meaningful employment. However, recent advances have allowed individuals with severe or profound mental disabilities (Moon, Inge, Wehman, Brooke, & Barcus, 1990), autism (Smith, Belcher, & Juhrs, 1995), and multiple disabilities (Goetz, Certo, Doering, & Lee, 1996) to obtain and maintain employment when provided appropriate and sufficient supports. Today, for individuals who choose not to enter post-secondary education after exiting special education programs, including those with significant disabilities, a real job in the local community is the preferred post-school outcome for all individuals.

Over the past ten years, a large number of post-school follow-up studies have been conducted to investigate the factors that contribute to the post-school employment success of students with disabilities (Peraino, 1992). Investigators have focused their attention on factors such as student demographic and functional characteristics, academic achievements and aptitudes, secondary curriculum, and the amount and type of vocational preparation provided in high school. Despite the large number of studies that have been completed, very few factors have been uncovered that will predict with any certainty whether the individual will be successfully employed after leaving school. One of the factors most frequently identified is whether the student was employed, either through a school program or in a part-time job outside of school, sometime during the high school years. In other words, individuals who work in paid employment settings while in school are far more likely to be successfully employed after leaving school.

The importance of employment while in school as a precursor of post-school employment success presents particular problems for students with significant disabilities. Many students with autism, severe cognitive disabilities, or multiple disabilities often fail to acquire the career awareness and exploration skills that could enable them to receive maximum benefit from vocational preparation programs in high school (Clark, Field, Patton, Brolin, & Sitlington, 1994). For example, many students with significant disabilities often continue to receive educational services in segregated settings that do not prepare them for actual employment settings in their local communities. These students may also be limited in their opportunities to perform odd jobs around their neighborhoods, assist with family chores, and engage in other activities that allow them to acquire basic vocational skills and good work habits (Clark & Kolstoe, 1995). As a result, many students with significant disabilities exit public school programs without any opportunity to gain basic work experience in real job settings in their local communities.

Availability of Needed Community Supports

For transition planning to be maximally effective, students with significant disabilities need to be able to obtain the services and supports they will need to achieve the short and long-term goals identified in their personal plan for the future. The amount and type of supports needed by students with disabilities vary widely. Some students may need employment assistance on only a short-term or temporary basis; other students may require long-term services provided by a supported employment agency for the entire duration of their employment. Some students will only require information and guidance in how to acquire assistive technology or other types of support; other students will need ongoing, continuous supervision and assistance in basic activities of daily living.

Some evidence exists to indicate that the adult services and supports needed by students with significant disabilities may be quite different from those required by other students with disabilities entering adult life (Kregel, 1995; Parent, Unger, Gibson, & Clements, 1994). For example, students with significant disabilities may be far more likely

to have substantial health-care needs that require assistive technology or other types of specialized services. Financial concerns may require individuals to investigate income support programs such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Whereas many individuals with disabilities can benefit from generic recreational services in their communities, some individuals with significant disabilities may require specialized recreation programs to enhance personal satisfaction and community inclusion (Moon, 1994). The extent to which these specialized services and supports are available will have a tremendous impact on the successful transition of students with significant disabilities.

The purpose of this article is to (1) investigate general trends in the design of transition services for individuals with significant disabilities and (2) determine whether transition planning for students with significant disabilities differs markedly from that provided to other individuals. It describes the anticipated post-school outcomes of a selected sample of 84 students with significant disabilities enrolled in Virginia schools. Data were collected as part of Virginia's State Transition Systems Change Project (Project UNITE) to enable local school districts to monitor trends in the transition planning process by reviewing key elements in the development and implementation of students' IEPs. This data-collection process, along with a process for assessing the satisfaction of young adults with disabilities after exiting school, are part of a model which Project UNITE is developing for collecting and using evaluation and outcome data for ongoing systems change. Results will be analyzed based in relation to: (1) participation in the IEP planning process by students, family members, school personnel and adult agency representatives; (2) anticipated post-school employment, independent living, and recreational environments; (3) anticipated post-school support needs; and (4) the type of vocational training and supports provided at the secondary level.

METHOD

As a key component of the five year Virginia Transition systems change project (Project UNITE), a series of 10-12 local school district transition incentive grants have been awarded annually during the past four years. The intent of these competitive grants is to stimulate program development activities in local school districts that will promote the growth of high-quality transition services in the state. As a condition of receiving a transition incentive grant, the local school district is required to participate in the Virginia Transition Planning Information System, a longitudinal database that tracks trends in the design and delivery of transition services across the participating districts. In some districts, all students with disabilities are reflected in the database. In other districts, which might serve several thousand students with disabilities, only a small sample of the students in the district are reflected in the database.

Sample

Eighty-four Virginia public school students, ages 14-21, with significant disabilities, comprised the sample. The sample was drawn from a data set of 2,364 students representing 21 school divisions across the state. The data were collected during the fall of 1994 and spring of 1995. Students were from rural and metropolitan school divisions that had been recipients of the one-year transition incentive grants. As a result, the sample reflects school divisions that have an interest in transition planning and should not be considered necessarily representative of all school divisions in the state.

Instrumentation

Data collection was achieved through the use of the IEP Transition Planning Information Form. The form was developed by a team of special educators, vocational rehabilitation professionals, parents of special education students, and relevant state

agency personnel. The form collects a wide variety of transition-related information and was initially based on similar forms developed by Bates (1990). Information collected on each individual includes basic student demographics; participants in the transition planning process; anticipated settings students will enter in the categories of education, employment, living arrangements, and recreation, and whether or not special supports will be needed. Data are also collected on the in-school services and supports students were receiving. The form is reviewed and modified annually to reflect new and emerging trends in design and delivery of transition services, such as the growth of Tech Prep programs in the state and the evolution of the School to Work Opportunities Act.

Procedure

All school personnel charged with the responsibility of completing the IEP Transition Planning Information Form received an in-depth inservice training on the use of the form. The form is designed to be completed at each student's IEP meeting, in order to insure that the information obtained accurately reflects the results of the meeting and to minimize the amount of effort required to complete the form. At the conclusion of each individual's IEP meeting, school personnel completed a form describing the student and his or her long-term goals as well as the transition services it was anticipated the student would need. The information was then routed to a central database for review and analysis. Reports were developed and returned to each participating school district to allow the district and systems-change project staff to use the information in planning training and technical assistance activities.

RESULTS

Data findings from the study are described in the following sections: 1) student characteristics, 2) participation in IEP meetings, 3) anticipated post-school outcomes, and 4) recommended in-school services and supports.

Student Characteristics

Analysis of demographic characteristics of the 84 students identified as having a significant disability are summarized in Table 1 below. The sample included students with autism, multiple disabilities, and severe and profound disabilities. Most of the students had three or more years remaining in public school. The majority of the students were Caucasian, slightly over a quarter (26%) were African American, and 1% were Hispanic. These racial demographics parallel the racial demographics in general public education in the state (Virginia Department of Education, 1995).

Table 1
Sample Characteristics

Characteristics	Percentage of Students
Primary Disability	
Autism	7
Multiple disabilities	44
Severe and profound disabilities	49
Year of Exit	
1994 - 95	13
1995 - 96	18
1996 - 97	17
1997 - 98	18
1998 - 99 and later	35
Ethnic Background	
Caucasian	73
Hispanic	1
African American	26

Participation in IEP Meetings

Participants at IEP meetings were divided into three primary groups (see Table 2 on the following

page). These groups included students and parents/guardians, school representatives, and community representatives. Participation rates of these groups were determined by whether they attended the IEP meeting and participated during the discussion of transition planning, were involved in the planning process (which means an individual was not at the meeting but has been involved in other discussions concerning the IEP transition plan), and were contacted or notified about the IEP meeting and asked to attend. IDEA requires that students be invited to participate in their IEP meetings where transition services will be discussed. Thirty-five percent of the students were present at their IEP meeting when transition planning was taking place. When this participation rate was compared with that of other students with disabilities (Virginia Department of Education, 1995), it was found that students with significant disabilities were less likely to attend their meetings. Fifteen percent of the students were involved in this IEP planning but did not attend this meeting. A fifth of the students in the sample were contacted about their meeting, with the remaining 30% having no participation in the process. Students who had three or more years remaining in school were more likely to attend or be involved in transition planning than students who were in their last year of school.

Strong participation rates (89%) were reported for parents and guardians. The high degree of involvement of family members remained constant across grade levels. Most of the representatives involved in the students' IEP transition planning were school staff members. The two most frequently cited school staff members were special education teachers and speech therapists. A little more than a third (36%) of the participants were identified as other school personnel. This group of school staff consisted of physical therapists, vision teachers, and other specialized teaching staff. Fourteen percent of the transition team members were occupational therapists. Guidance counselors and regular vocational education teachers were part of the planning process about 10% of the time.

Community representatives who typically participated in transition planning were rehabilitation counselors (4%) and case managers from local service agencies for individuals with significant disabilities (19%). Community representatives were more likely to become a part of the transition planning for those students who remained in school beyond 18 years of age. Community employment agency staff or employers were not typically members of the transition team.

Table 2

Participation/Involvement in Transition Planning

Participants	Percentage of Transition Meetings	
	Attended	**Involved**
Consumer		
Student	35	15
Parent/Guardian	89	2
School Representative		
Special education teachers	93	1
Vocational education teachers	6	5
Occupational therapist	14	7
Speech therapist	24	19
Guidance counselor	5	4
Other school personnel	36	6
Community Representatives		
Rehabilitation counselors	4	2
Case managers	19	7
Employment-related	6	2

Anticipated Post-school Settings

An analysis was conducted of the recommended adult services identified in the transition planning process. Services were divided into a

variety of categories, as shown below in Table 3. Primary categories included continuing education/ post-secondary education, employment/vocational, living arrangements; and recreation/ leisure. Other service categories included transportation and income supports, which consisted of medical and other services such as counseling and legal aid.

Employment was more often identified as a student's primary post school goal than post-secondary education or training. Yet only a little more than a third of the plans (38%) identified competitive employment options as the student's transition goals. These included full-time (12%), part-time (5%), and supported (21%) employment. The most frequently identified post-school employment outcome was placement in a sheltered workshop (32%). School personnel were asked to indicate whether or not special services or supports would be needed to enable students to become employed. Over 92% responded that special supports would be needed.

Most transition plans identified a student's living arrangement after high school as living with family members (60%). Nineteen percent of plans identified supervised living as the post-school setting. When asked if special supports or services would be needed, 72% of the school staff indicated yes.

More than half of the transition plans (56%) identified specialized recreation activities as the students' transition goal. A small number of the plans (13%) identified self-directed activities as a goal.

Other service categories identified as needed by students were analyzed. Services that involved medical care or income support were frequently identified. These services included Medicaid (74%); food stamps (32%); SSI (82%); and community services through Medicaid waivers (37%). Personal assistance services (14%) and SSDI (15%) were also identified as necessary support services. Most transition plans identified special transportation (57%) or transportation provided by family members (63%) as anticipated post-school outcomes. Only 16% of the plans identified public transportation as a desired service.

Table 3

Percentage of Students Receiving Recommendations for Specific Adult Services

Adult Services	Percentage
Continuing/Post-Secondary Education	
Four-year college	6
Community college	4
Trade school	7
Employment	
Full-time	12
Part-time	5
Supported employment	21
Sheltered workshop	32
Adult activity	8
Living Arrangements	
Living independently	10
Living with family member	60
Supervised living	19
Residential care	7
Recreation/Leisure	
Group-sponsored	10
Specialized	56
Self-directed	13
Transportation	
Public	16
Special	57
Family members	63
Income Supports	
Medicaid	74
Food stamps	32
SSI	82
SSDI	15
Personal assistance services	14
Medicaid waiver services	37

Recommended In-School Services

School personnel were asked to identify the in-school services students would receive as part of their IEP. In-school services were categorized as vocational preparation programs and modifications/

supports (see Table 4). Few students were involved in vocational activities that would directly lead to employment. None of the students was currently employed outside of school. The vocational preparation for a majority of these students focused on special vocational education. Activities listed under this category included prevocational training, job placement, and community work experience. Most students (94%) were identified as needing prevocational training. Only 7% of the plans identified job placement activities and 30% community-based work experience.

Participation in regular vocational education or community-based work experience programs was limited. Ten percent of the students' IEP recommended regular vocational education and 26% identified community-based work experience programs as an outcome.

Supports and services to assist students while in school were analyzed. Eighty-four percent of the students had specific modifications and supports identified on their IEPs. A majority of the students needed specific services, including learning materials modified (66%), curriculum modifications (62%), and support services such as team teaching or vocational resource teachers (62%), and adapted physical education (67%). Assistive technology devices were identified on 44% of the plans. Services and supports that would assist students with daily living skills and other skills necessary to prepare for their transition into the community were also assessed. The most frequently identified supports on their IEPs included guidance and counseling services (33%), daily living skills training (84%), and social skills training (75%). Only 18% had supports focusing on self-advocacy skills specified on their plans.

Table 4

Percentage of Students Receiving Recommendations for Specific In-School Services

In-School Services	Percentage
Vocational Preparation	
Regular vocational education	10
Special vocational education	64
Community-based	26
Modifications/Supports	
Curriculum	62
Materials	66
Support services	62
Adapted physical education	67
Assistive technology	44
Guidance and counseling	33
Daily living skills training	84
Social skills training	75
Self-advocacy training	18

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to monitor trends in the transition planning process by reviewing key elements in the development and implementation of students' IEPs. The results provide insights into the participation or involvement of students with significant disabilities and their family members in transition programs, participation of school personnel and community representatives on the transition team, anticipated post-school goals identified by transition teams for these students, and the type of vocational training and supports provided at the secondary level. The experiences of these 84 students highlight the need for increased opportunities to: 1) participate in IEP meetings, 2) engage in activities which assist them in learning and practicing skills of self-advocacy and choice, 3) obtain competitive employment in the community, and 4) access needed community supports.

Participation in IEP Meetings

When assessing student participation in the transition planning process, the results of this study clearly indicate differences in participation rates of

students with significant disabilities when compared to a larger sample of students with disabilities (Virginia Department of Education, 1995). The data show that only a third of the students with significant disabilities were present at their IEP meetings. Fifteen percent of the students were involved in the development of their transition plans, but did not attend their meetings. These participation rates are significantly lower than students with mild or moderate disabilities (Virginia Department of Education, 1995). Three fourths of these students are attending their meetings and 15% are involved in the planning process. Ten percent of the students with mild and moderate disabilities were not participating in the planning process, compared to 30% of the students with significant disabilities.

It is well documented that parent participation is a significant part of transition programs (Sale, Metzler, Everson, & Moon, 1991; Schultz, 1986). The results of this study show that family participation remained high throughout the students' school career. When compared to the larger sample of students with disabilities (Virginia Department of Education, 1995), participation rates of parents of students with more mild or moderate disabilities began to decline as the student came closer to exiting school.

The results of the study indicate that more related-services staff - for example, occupational therapists, speech therapists, and physical therapists - are involved in IEP meetings for students with significant disabilities. Limited participation or involvement of school personnel other than special education personnel is reported in the sample of students with mild or moderate disabilities (Virginia Department of Education, 1995).

Participation at IEP meetings of rehabilitation counselors and individuals from employment-related organizations or the business community remain low. Case managers from local service agencies serving students with significant disabilities were more often in attendance than any other community representative. Case managers attended meetings or were involved in the transition planning process for more than a quarter of the students.

Anticipated Post-school Outcomes

Employment was more frequently identified as an anticipated post-school outcome than education or training. Supported employment and other competitive employment outcomes were anticipated for over one third of the students with significant disabilities. However, more students (40%) had sheltered or day activity centers as their employment goal. Anticipated employment outcomes still remain different for these students than for students with other disabilities (deFur, Getzel, & Kregel, 1994) in that transition planning for these students continues to predominately identify a segregated setting as a post-school employment outcome.

Vocational preparation activities reported in this study indicate a high degree of participation in separate and special prevocational programs. A majority of the students were participating in special vocational education with an identified need for prevocational training. Only 7% were involved in job placement activities, and less than a third were receiving community-based work experience. None of the students in this study were employed outside of school. When these results were compared with the results of students with other disabilities, it was found that more than 50% of the students with mild or moderate disabilities were enrolled in regular vocational education, less than a quarter of the students were enrolled in special vocational education, and approximately 20% were involved in a community-based work experience program (Virginia Department of Education, 1995).

Anticipated supports and services identified by transition teams in this study support the findings from other studies that students with significant disabilities will require long-term and ongoing supports upon exiting school. The data

from this study demonstrate the varied supports anticipated, from specialized transportation to Medicaid waivers. For a majority of these students, Medicaid, SSI, and Medicaid waiver services were seen as essential supports.

In-School Supports and Services

While in school, students with significant disabilities received a variety of related services, assistive technology, and modifications. Students with significant disabilities were more likely to receive training in daily living skills or social skills than students with mild or moderate disabilities. Students with significant disabilities were less likely to have self-advocacy skills identified on their IEPs than students with mild or moderate disabilities (Virginia Department of Education, 1995).

In summary, the results of this study indicate differences in participation rates of students with significant disabilities when compared to students with mild or moderate disabilities. Just over a third of the students in this study are attending their IEP transition planning meetings, which is notably less than attendance for other students with disabilities. Family participation remained high throughout the school careers for these students. Related services staff were more likely to participate in the transition planning process for students with significant disabilities, as were case managers from the community. Yet, for students with significant disabilities, anticipated employment outcomes still continue to be different from those for other students with disabilities. Transition planning for students in this study identified segregated employment settings as a post-school outcome.

Student Participation

Students with significant disabilities must be included as part of the IEP transition planning process. The results of this study indicate that only a third of these students are actually present at their meetings. Another 16% have been involved in transition planning, but were not present at their meeting. What is particularly disturbing is the number of students who were minimally engaged or not participating at all in this process. In this study, as many as half of the students with significant disabilities were on the periphery of taking part in the discussions about their future. Although there is a great deal of information about how students with disabilities can assume responsibility within the transition planning process, most of the information focuses on students with mild or moderate disabilities. Families and professionals alike seek evidence from the research and practitioner community that provides guidance in meaningfully involving their students with significant disabilities in the transition process (Morningstar, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 1995). Successful policies, practices, and methods must be brought to the attention of the special education and human services professions.

School Personnel Participation

The results of the study indicate that in addition to special education staff and families, related-services personnel were more likely to be involved in the transition planning process for students with significant disabilities than for students with mild or moderate disabilities. These team members identified a number of anticipated outcomes related to the students' employment, living arrangements, and leisure activities, and the long-term supports and services. What is important to note in this study is that, for a majority of the students, the community living outcomes anticipated by the transition team were options that did not place them in the mainstream of their communities. Transition team members need technical assistance and training on the range of options to be considered when developing transition plans for students with significant disabilities. Transition teams members need a better understanding of the complexities of the adult service delivery system and the scope of services provided. With a broader knowledge of

such services as SSI, supported employment, and Centers for Independent Living, transition team members can identify the services and supports that help students with significant disabilities achieve greater independence and productivity.

Family Participation

Family involvement in educational planning remained high throughout the school career for students involved in this study. This finding is encouraging, particularly for students with significant disabilities. Family involvement in transition planning for students with significant disabilities is critical, because families may be their one ongoing and consistent source of support. Families also need support and clear and accurate information from professionals to prepare them for their ongoing role as case managers for their family member with a significant disability (Steere, Pancsofar, Wood, & Hecimovic, 1990). Schools and IEP transition planning provide a forum for discussing post-secondary expectations, services and options; families become empowered as they gain this knowledge. Increasing family members' skills as advocates and their understanding of person-centered services and supports enhances the probability of success in post school services.

Employment Outcomes

Employment preparation for students with significant disabilities continues to challenge educators and communities. It is encouraging that some of the students within this study had job placement and community work experiences addressed as part of their transition planning. Clearly, professionals and families have begun to explore vocational options for these students and identified vocational outcomes as possibilities for them. Nonetheless, a greater number of these students still had segregated work environments identified as their primary post-school outcome. It is critical that students have the opportunity to be assessed in a variety of employment settings with ongoing goals of developing the skills and supports needed to function in less restrictive environments.

SUMMARY

This article described the results of a study monitoring the trends in the transition planning process for students with significant disabilities across 24 school divisions in Virginia. The results indicate that for a majority of students with significant disabilities, there is a need for greater participation in the planning of their future, increased opportunities to access employment before exiting school, and access to a range of services to provide ongoing support in the community.

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