

Into the workforce: Employers' perspectives of inclusion

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Employment is an important component to community living that allows persons with disabilities the opportunity to form new relationships and learn new skills. Individuals with disabilities have much to contribute to the work place and, if a proper "fit" is achieved, work inclusion can benefit all involved. This project provides an insight into the work experiences of persons with developmental disabilities through the eyes of the employers. Through in-depth interviews with the employers, strategies used to assist persons with disabilities in the workplace were described and challenges to inclusion were identified. Despite these challenges, however, both the persons with developmental disabilities and the other individuals in the environment benefitted from workplace inclusion.

Introduction

Historically, persons with disabilities have faced numerous obstacles in obtaining employment (i.e., segregation, institutionalization). Recently, however, there has been an increase in the employment of persons with developmental disabilities. In 1986, the Employment Equity Act (amended in 1995) named persons with disabilities as one of four groups that are beneficiaries to employment equity. Specifically,

The purpose of this act is to achieve equality in the workplace so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability and, in fulfillment of that goal, to correct the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced by women, aboriginal peoples, *persons with disabilities* and members of visible minority groups by giving effect to the principle that employment equity means more than treating persons in the same way but also requires special measures and the accommodation of differences (Purpose of the Act section, para. 1).

Not only must employers allow persons with disabilities an equal opportunity at employment but they must also actively identify and eliminate employment barriers and institute policies that allow reasonable accommodations for persons with special needs.

In response to the Employment Equity Act and the desire of persons with disabilities to be included in the workplace, the Federal Office of Disability Issues initiated programs to remove barriers and improve the social and economic inclusion of persons with disabilities (Hutchinson, 2002). Progress is evident in that 56.3% of individuals with disabilities were participating in the workforce in 1991 compared to 48.5% in 1986 (Fawcett, 1996). This rate is still lower than the 57.6% of people without disabilities who are employed, but the gap is narrowing.

Employees with disabilities can fill many employment positions that are meaningful and add to the work setting. According to Bauer (1997), effective placement is a matter of finding the right "fit" between a person and his/her job. In fact, with the right "fit," some of these jobs naturally lend the support needed.

Inclusion in the Workplace

Social relationships are critical to the emotional, social, and physical well-being of all individuals, especially those with developmental disabilities.¹ Persons with developmental disabilities who have healthy social relationships are more likely to have a positive self-concept, a better sense of belonging, more developed communication skills, healthier emotional functioning, better coping strategies, keener problem-solving abilities, enhanced life skills, better social cognition, and fewer behavioural outbursts (Geisthardt, Botherson, & Cook, 2002; Heiman, 2000; Schleien, Heyne, Rynders, & McAvoy, 1990; Schleien, Ray, & Green, 1997; Smith, 1981; Stainback & Stainback, 1987). Work settings are the second most important social unit in many people's lives, with family often being the first (Stewart, 1985). Hatch (1993) suggested that work settings contain a culture of their own and have shared meanings, expectations, and values that set the social atmosphere of the setting. In many cases this social atmosphere can be one of acceptance and positive social interactions. Test, Hinson, Solow, and Keul (1993) found that 97.1% of employees with developmental disabilities reported having a co-worker as a friend. In addition, 38.1% of the participants reported having opportunities to socialize with their co-workers after work hours.

However, Chadsey and Beyer (2001) found that some work cultures are more conducive to inclusion than others. For example, Green, Schleien, Mactavish, and Benepe (1995) found evidence of rejection of adults with developmental disabilities if these adults showed negative or aggressive behaviours, there were immediate negative perceptions of them, and social contact was discontinued. Furthermore, Rusch, Hughes, Johnson, and Minch (1991) found that, although co-workers were willing to take on several roles in the lives of their co-workers with developmental disabilities (e.g., trainer or evaluator), few would identify themselves as a friend of the person with a disability. The frequency of teasing, joking, and general conversations was lower with employees with developmental disabilities.

Different types of social relationships can occur in inclusive work settings. Henderson and Argyle (1985) described three types of relationships that occur between persons with disabilities and their nondisabled co-workers: work acquaintances, work friends, and social friends. Work acquaintances meet each other through work tasks and have superficial or task-oriented relationships. Work friends, however, have more intimate interactions and can interact socially as well as through their work. On an even deeper level, social friends initially meet at work but carry their friendship beyond the workplace and meet at external events. Depending on the social atmosphere of the work culture, co-workers can assume many roles in the lives of persons with disabilities (Chadsey & Beyer, 2001; Hatch, 1993), even as friends.

Summary of Previous Research

Despite the increasing employment rates of persons with disabilities and the benefits of including persons with developmental disabilities in the workplace, little research has delved, in depth, into the employment experiences of persons with developmental disabilities. The studies that have been completed in the employment settings have focussed on the social relationships in the settings rather than the overall work experiences. Moreover, no study has directly examined the experiences and perspectives of the employers. Many past studies have used researcher observation as the methodology of choice (Chadsey & Beyer, 2001; Green, Schleien, Mactavish, & Benepe, 1995; Hatch, 1993). It is of

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utmost importance that the issue of inclusion in the workplace is examined so everyone involved can reap the benefits that employment of persons with developmental disabilities can bring.

Methods

Sample Description and Data Collection

This report is part of a larger study entitled "Inclusion Across the Lifespan," a project focussed on exploring the overall inclusive experiences persons with developmental disabilities have in their school, work, and leisure settings. In an attempt to better understand inclusion in the workplace, the employers of any participant with a developmental disability were contacted for an interview. In total, 10 employers agreed to participate in this inquiry.

The employers in this study represented a wide variety of work settings ranging from community businesses to charity organizations to sheltered workshops. These employers represented both urban and rural communities and employed persons of varying disabilities. Each employer was interviewed twice over a three year period. The interviews were designed to be open-ended and semi-structured, thus allowing the employers to freely express their thoughts, beliefs, and experiences of inclusion of persons with disabilities in their workplaces. Guiding questions were presented as opening topics (see Table 1 for sample questions) and each interviewee was encouraged to expand on any topic he/she felt necessary. In addition, following each interview, the employers were asked if they wished to add any further comments that were not discussed during the interview. All interviews and comments were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim in preparation for further analysis.

Table 1
Sample employer interview questions from the Inclusion Across the Lifespan Research Project

<p><u>Logistics</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tell me about your business (i.e. what is the business, how many employees, what do employees do?) 2. Do you have other employees who have disabilities besides [the participant]? 3. How long has [the participant] been an employee at your business? 4. How did [the participant] come to be an employee for your business (i.e., what was the basis of the match?) <p><u>Supports & Accommodations</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Are you involved with an advocacy agency for [the participant]'s employment? 6. Does [the participant] have a job coach or somebody that assists him/her? 7. Are there any special provisions or preparation that you have provided to assist [the participant]'s inclusion at work? <p><u>Employee Characteristics</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. What kind of employee is [the participant]? 9. How does [the participant] interact with his/her co-workers? 10. How does [the participant] interact with his/her supervisors? 11. If applicable, how does [the participant] interact with the customers/clients? <p><u>Perspectives of the Employee Inclusion</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Do you feel that [the participant] is included in the work environment? If so, can you describe some examples of this inclusion? 13. Are there any challenges [the participant] has at work? If so, what are they? <p><u>Advantages of Workplace Inclusion</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 14. What are the advantages to having [the participant] work for your company? 15. What are the areas of growth that [the participant] has shown during his/her time with your organization?

Data Analysis

Using Kvale's (1996) conception of thematic analysis, the researchers "mined" through the transcripts searching for the meaning of the experiences described in each interview. For the purposes of this paper, themes are defined as "ideas of unified or holistic meanings" (Van Manen, 1997). As each theme was identified and described, the data became less ambiguous and the stories of each employer's experiences were created. The first step to such exploration was the coding of all transcript data. Using NUDIST (N6, 2002), each interview transcript was uploaded into a data analysis program where the researchers could organize each file line by line into codes and subcodes, thus allowing common trends to emerge across experiences. As described by Marshall (2002), this was not a one step process and often required revising, moving, or deleting codes as the analysis progressed. The researchers *Developmental Disabilities Bulletin*, 2008, Vol. 36, No. 1 & 2

often coded and recoded the data in a search for greater understanding, thus allowing the themes to “emerge from the data.” As a final step, codes were then organized into broader themes and categories in an attempt to create a picture of the employment experiences of persons with disabilities and their employers.

Presuppositions of the Researchers

To maintain the trustworthiness of the data, it is important to identify the pre-understandings and subjectivities of the principal researcher. To acknowledge these presuppositions is to allow the reader to understand the *lens* through which the data were interpreted. In the past, the principal researcher worked as a support person for individuals with developmental disabilities. It is her belief that inclusion in the workplace is an essential component to community living. A person’s employment gives one a sense of accomplishment and provides an environment in which individuals can meet potential friends.

In addition, the principal researcher has experience in both successful and unsuccessful inclusive settings and believes that simply placing a person with a developmental disability in a work environment is not sufficient. Proper supports need to be in place in order for inclusion in the workplace to be successful. The researcher believes that these supports can come in a variety of forms, whether from support personnel, family members, or peers. It is through these supports that inclusion in the workplaces can benefit all those involved.

Results

Rates of Employment Among the “Inclusion Across the Lifespan” Adult Participants

In order to understand the experiences of persons with developmental disabilities in the workplace, one must first understand the settings in which the work activities are taking place; therefore, each employer was asked to describe the employment and work environments for each of the individuals with developmental disabilities. Of the 18 adults with developmental disabilities in the “Inclusion Across the Lifespan” study,

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nine worked exclusively for pay. Of these nine employees, one was employed in a sheltered workshop as well as in various community settings. Examples of these positions included daycare staff, playschool assistant, office staff, and kitchen help. One out of 18 employees with disabilities volunteered in his/her community and did not have paid employment. This individual volunteered his/her time as labourer and security guard at a local shop. In four cases, the individuals with developmental disabilities participated in both paid and volunteer work. Sheltered workshops provided employment support to two of these individuals. Some of these positions included charity work, grocery stores, and delivering flyers. Finally, four of the adult participants in the "Inclusion Across the Lifespan" project did not have a job or volunteer position. All four of these participants stated a desire to work, however.

Methods of Finding Employment

The persons with developmental disabilities involved in this project acquired their employment using one of three sources of support. Two out of 18 adults with developmental disabilities searched for and found their own employment. In contrast, however, 11 out of 18 persons with developmental disabilities relied on agency support in their search for employment. In these cases, support personnel would find work placements for the individuals with developmental disabilities. An interesting source used to find employment was through family. Five of the adults with developmental disabilities relied on their parents or family members to help them search for and obtain employment or volunteer opportunities. In most of these cases the parent/guardian would contact the employers and obtain the placement for the person with the developmental disability.

Employer Description of Employees with Disabilities

When asked to describe their employees with disabilities the majority of employers described positive traits that their employees had.

Very dedicated, very dedicated. Very hard worker, very dedicated. As a matter of fact, when [she] was experiencing a few medical problems here some time ago and we tried to

encourage her to take a break from doing the laundry and the other, and just take life a little easier, no way. No way. That was her job; that was what she had to do. So she's extremely dedicated. And very knowledgeable about her work and certainly knows what she has to do (employer of 44 year old female).

In a few cases, the employers discussed some challenging characteristics that the employees with developmental disabilities may possess but always followed up with a positive comment.

But she can be a little bossy [laughter], for sure. She likes to have it her way, as we all do. I like to get my way, and she likes to get her way. I'm not sure how well you know her or how much you talk to her, but during problems and things, sometimes she'll get into arguments or she'll be telling some of her friends and peers here to do things certain ways. But relatively minor. She can be pretty stubborn too, but that's her personality. But generally she's a lot of fun to be around, a fun person to have here (employer of 22 year old female).

Overall, the employers seemed to value their employees with disabilities and, although there could be negative traits that were shown by the employees with developmental disabilities, most often the positive characteristics and traits would prevail, thus allowing for positive interactions in the workplace.

Types of Interactions in the Workplaces

In the work settings, all employees with developmental disabilities were reported to have positive relationships with their bosses or supervisors. In one case, there was a strong attachment to the supervisor reported:

So she has a tendency to hang onto that attachment to the former staff until she develops a good rapport with the new staff, and then she's fine with it (employer of 43 year old female).

As described previously, even in cases where there may have been negative traits that the employers found difficult, the relationships were still defined as positive overall.

As for interactions with co-workers, five of the employers described the exchanges between co-workers as positive. There was good communication and shared responsibility between that person with a disability and his/her co-workers.

[She] will need something from us, and she really has to keep coming back and being a broken record on the subject so she actually gets her needs met, because it's hard to nail us down and actually take the time to meet. This workshop that we're doing - these two workshops that [her] and I are doing together, she's just been excellent to let me know that she needs some planning time, she doesn't want to do it at the very last minute, asks me to sort of write it out and be sure that I'm really clear about what we're going to do and when we're going to do it. And we've sort of built (inaudible) into the mix too where they're going to do a video. But [she's] been very good to keep coming back to me to say, "When are we going to meet? And when are we going to do that? And have you got it figured out?" And so I appreciate that (employer of 27 year old female).

In addition, the co-workers seemed to respect the individuals with disabilities for their work ethic.

He's very respectful, very respectful. And I think he's a really good role model for the others in terms of that, because, I mean, [he] comes from a generation where you respected your elders and you respected the people that you reported to, and I think that some of that has been lost over the years, and I think you need a balance of that. Certainly I wouldn't want to work for my father, but at the same time you need to respect the people that you're working with and that you report to, he certainly demonstrates all of that... (employer of 63 year old male).

However, in some cases, as reported by five of the employers, some negative interactions between co-workers were reported. At times, the participants would have strong personality traits that interfered with their relationships with their peers. One employer described it in this way:

[She] certainly has some determined characteristics. Things have to be done a very certain way with [her], and she quite often informs the others [laughter] - (inaudible) - informs others how the job should be done, which sometimes will cause some difficulties, but she works through it (employer of 43 year old female).

Overall, interactions with customers in the workplaces were reported to be positive in nature.

Yes, with the clients she's normally pretty good, like I said. I talked a little bit about that - really friendly, social. I think she's got a couple of people here that she'd really consider to be good friends, which is quite nice (employer of 27 year old female).

On only one occasion did an employer talk about a negative incident with a customer, but this seemed to be an exception within this theme.

Yes. One time - this is quite a scary incident - he - and I should tell you, he was working here, and this one drunk person came in the store. And we have a policy that if you want to buy a sandwich, you have to pay for it first before you put it in the microwave. This person, he was obviously drunk, and [he] noticed that, and he was asking the clerk how much the sandwich is. And I guess the clerk said, "The price is on the product." And because it's (inaudible), maybe he didn't read it; he asked the clerk again. And [he] was listening to all this, and during this was happening, [he] got quickly mad, and he got out the front door, and he grabbed a milk container decanter and hit him right on his head (employer of 63 year old male).

Strategies to Promote Inclusion

Two types of strategies were described when discussing inclusion in the workplaces: formal and informal. Formal strategies are those that require specialized programmatic changes such as using specialized equipment or support staff. Informal strategies, however, are those that can be used in any environment without the use of specialized equipment or programming. They are often simple strategies that can be used by anyone in the workplace to assist the employee with developmental disabilities in his/her workplace.

Formal strategies. In this study, 5 of the employees with disabilities were accompanied by a job coach in their workplace. These support personnel were available to provide assistance, encouragement, and additional supervision as needed. At times, though, there was concern that the job coach may try to provide too much assistance to the person with a disability, thus impeding his/her independence in the workplace.

What [the job coach] is supposed to do [laughter] - we won't go there - is basically supposed to encourage him, not do the work for him, but try to be there to supervise him so I don't have to supervise him. This way he's not pressured to go fast; he can go at his own speed. Basically just encourage him, try to get an "okay, maybe try your left hand, and you do it - for the next ten minutes, use your left hand." You try to challenge him, but keep him motivated, but not necessarily do the job for him. Correct him if he's wrong, but not basically to do it, just to stand back and guide him (employer of 19 year old male).

In one case, specialized equipment was needed in the workplace to assist the persons with disabilities in completing their tasks. For example, one participant used a communication device (i.e., computer voice output) to assist him in effectively communicating with others in his workplace. This equipment helped the individual with a disability to overcome his speech difficulties so it did not interfere with his performance at work.

In addition to job coaching, peer modelling was also used as a strategy to include persons with disabilities in the work place. In one agency, peer

teams were formed based on their interests so they could support each other and take part in activities together.

The teams are kind of set up based on trying to find peers that work well together (employer of 22 year old female).

Because the peers were able to interact and support each other on these teams, support personnel could often take a less active role, thus allowing for more natural interactions in the work/volunteer sites.

Relatedly, for two of the employees with disabilities, visual cues were used in the workplace to remind the individuals what needed to be completed and reducing their need for supervision, thus increasing their independence. For example, in one case, providing the employee with a list assisted her in completing her work tasks independently.

If I'm not here during the play group, so we write notes, so it's in a written form, and then she has a list of things to do, so she can put a checkmark: "Okay, I did this. Then I can go to the next step" (employer of 28 year old female).

In another instance, direction and pictures on how to work the photocopier increased an employee's understanding and allowed her to independently complete her office work.

The struggle that they had in the very, very, very beginning was the Xerox machine, and they would Xerox things. And they have things made up for them, which buttons to press and this and that, and sometimes they're sent by themselves to do this little package that they're doing or whatever.

Collaborative meetings were another important strategy used in many of the workplaces. Two of the employers discussed how they found it to be important to collaborate directly with the individuals with disabilities in order to communicate directly with the person with the disability and find out his/her needs and desires first-hand.

So then I'm negotiating with [her], "Okay, how do you feel if I do this and this this way?" And if [she] liked the way that [her previous supervisor] did, so, okay, so I learn how to do it (employer of 28 year old female).

Having regular meetings between the employer and employee helped to keep the lines of communication open and resolve any challenges or conflicts that may arise. In other cases collaboration among supervisors, support staff, and the guardians was essential for the workplace inclusion. Two employers discussed the team approach they took in striving for the inclusion of the employee with a disability.

It's the team. I mean, the team leader will provide guidance and support as needed. It's not kind of that dictatorial leadership style that we were looking for; it's more someone that will just kind of guide when people are needing assistance. And people help each other out down there as well (employer of 63 year old male).

An important part of this team was the guardians. Communication was kept open between the employers and the guardians through formal collaborative meetings and frequent contact.

So she's on [this staff member's] caseload, and so [she] kind of plans their days, and is the primary contact, and she's the one that prepares the paperwork. There's a month-end summary and the annual report; it's an annual review. And basically the primary contact has most of the contact with the guardians and her parents and things like that (employer of 22 year old female).

Informal strategies. During the interviews with the employers, the importance of flexibility in the workplace was a recurring theme. Five employers stated that flexibility was essential to the inclusion of persons with developmental disabilities in the workplace. It was important for the employers to identify which tasks were best suited for the employees with disabilities rather than assigning them to random errands.

But even like building boxes, he was having some frustration with them. So going back and saying, "Okay, what are [his] gifts? What does he like to do? [He] loves to fold. And what is he really good at?" And then getting [him] to do just that. And we did that. I don't know if you could call it a provision. Some people might call it a provision, but I guess it's just fitting the task to what people's gifts are, and so the results have just been remarkable (employer of 63 year old male).

In addition to carefully assigning tasks, allowing the employees with disabilities a choice was an important component to their inclusion. This strategy helped to empower the individuals with developmental disabilities and made for a more positive work setting.

We do just evaluations and then interests, tests, what they want to do and what's their - I don't know - talent, what do they like to do, and their goals. They have to go through their goals and see, if he wants to go cooking and it's not even in his goal, if he has time for it, then we will put him in it. But if he doesn't and that's not one of his goals or what he's willing to work on, then we might not put him in cooking (employer of 37 year old male).

Though choice was an important component to inclusion in the workplace it often had to be balanced with structure as well. Two employers discussed the importance of structure in the environment so the employees with developmental disabilities would know what was expected of them.

I think it would be hard if she didn't have a primary person to go to for support and direction and supervision. So we're pretty clear that not anybody other than [her supervisor], and then if [her supervisor's] not around, [this coordinator], because they're working so close together (employer of 28 year old female).

It seemed that the employees with developmental disabilities needed a structured environment to clearly understand their tasks, not become overwhelmed, and achieve success.

Finally, as a third informal strategy, encouragement was a necessity in the inclusion of employees with disabilities. This encouragement came in two forms: 1) positive reinforcement, and 2) redirection. In two cases, the employers stated that they provided reinforcement and encouragement to the individuals with developmental disabilities for making good choices.

And as far as what [her support staff] does on a day-to-day basis to kind of prepare and to get [her] ready for outings and to encourage her to do things that maybe she's a little hesitant to participate in, it'd probably be just the pretty standard stuff—letting her know what's going on and a lot of positive reinforcement for making good choices and things like that (employer of 22 year old female).

This type of encouragement was also useful when areas of improvement emerged and the employers saw things that the employee with disabilities could be doing differently.

We certainly help each other by giving feedback, knowing that we want to have an opportunity to grow, and so if someone here thinks that there's a place where [she] is ready to take a new step or that maybe we need to give her a little bit of encouragement in an area, we do that, because we want her to feel that if she gets a job somewhere else, that she's been in an environment where we have set her up for success (employer of 28 year old female).

Sometimes, encouragement in the form of redirection was used if employees needed to change their behaviour or the way they approached a task.

One problem with the toys, she likes the toys, she likes to play with it more than cleaning them, so you kind of need to redirect her and say, "Okay, now it's time to clean up. You can play with it at another time when you are at home because it's a job site; you're not supposed to be playing" (employer of 30 year old female).

In other cases, redirection took the form of repetition in that, at times, the employees had difficulties completing certain tasks so the employer had to continually provide prompting and redirection on the steps to take to complete the chore.

But if there's anything where it's work related and there may be a three-, four-, five-step process that he has to do, he does not have the confidence to do it. Again with him, it would be repetition, repetition, repetition (employer of 37 year old male).

Four employers stated that they used redirection and repetition as an informal strategy in their workplaces.

Challenges to Inclusion in the Workplace

Despite the efforts of the employers and the supports put in place to assist the persons with disabilities in their workplace inclusion, there were several challenges still present. According to five of the employers, some of the employees with developmental disabilities displayed difficult behaviours that could impede their inclusion in the work place. In one incident some of the individuals with developmental disabilities would show a resistance to change in the workplace.

[She] doesn't like change, so that was one of the things we really, really had to work on with [her], was, "You know what? Things change, and some days you're asked to do something that's a little bit different than what you normally would do, because if you're working in the community, that certainly will happen, because that's just life." So we've had to teach her to become adaptable and a little more flexible, and that was, I think, her major hurdle (employer of 44 year old female).

In many work environments there is a need for constant change to speed production or replace staff members so a resistance to this type of change could at times make working in these environments very difficult.

Another challenge that was reported by three of the employers and was related to these behavioral challenges was social skills deficits. Some of the employees with disabilities displayed a lack of knowledge of social skills thus making it difficult to form relationships with their co-workers.

There isn't a lot. I think I kind of referred to this before. There are some concerns with social skills—not any more so than anybody else that attends here. So, like I said, sometimes she can be a little bossy, or if—I'm trying to think of a good example that would illustrate that. Yes, she would—I think it's just more interacting appropriately. Sometimes she can be a little mean to some of her peers if she's upset, or just making sure she's communicating or trying to tell people what to do when they have the right to make their own choices just like she does (employer of 22 year old female).

If appropriate social skills were not present there was an increased risk of conflict in the work environment and inclusion of the person with a developmental disability was impeded.

A third challenge that was reported by six of the employers was physical difficulties. Some of the employees with developmental disabilities were faced with physical impairments or health problems that affected the way they did their jobs.

So she's starting to suffer from some hip problems and back problems and like that, so—the family was actually requesting that she do less and less of that kind of thing. But it's still [her] choice as to what it is she wants to do, and until [she] will be convinced or be requesting or agreeing to make some changes, we will support [her] in what she wants to do (employer of 44 year old female).

The employees with disabilities often had the desire to work hard, but they were sometimes slowed down because of their physical ailments or difficulties.

In other instances, according to three of the employers, the tasks in the workplace were too difficult for the employees with developmental disabilities; therefore, they were not able to fully participate in all activities in their work settings.

Well, probably [pause], I guess, a tad bit harder perhaps clerical things, like operating the mail machine. It would take a long time to show her how to do that. I mean, there are really only certain clerical things you can give them to do (employer of 63 year old female).

Other challenges that were discussed in four of the employer interviews were external to the individuals with disabilities and were challenges present in the work environment or programs. For example, one employer described how one employee was hindered by the funding structure.

Well, I think in a perfect world [she] would work here full time, or by choice work a different job than this one. I think that just budget wise it's an obstacle for us. It's a position that we've never funded before, and to actually carve out the funding to have a person just strictly for play group, I think we'd have to have maybe a few more components of our program where here's a real purpose for [her], where she really would feel like she's doing something she likes to do. Because we're not centre based and we really want not to be centre based, we want to be kind of out there in community, I think it is a little limiting as a job for job potential and advancement, even if advancement means more hours of work in a week. So it would be great if we had in our neighborhood another place where [she] could do similar work or something and could combine maybe two jobs. So in my mind, AISH is a little limiting in that I know that [her parent/guardian] wants her not to earn more than that sort of set amount that AISH lets you have. I think that if we really felt that this was going to be stable and that we could maybe even expand, I think we can try to make our case to say, "How about if we combine this AISH and this employ—? And yes, AISH will cut back a little bit, but we won't jeopardize some of the

benefits." So I think we've got room to grow as far as being an employer and making this a good employment situation for her. I'd like to be able to do that (employer of a 27-year old female).

This employer saw his/her employee as a capable, valuable member of his/her staff, but the employee was limited in how much she could work because her funding only allowed her to work a certain number of hours before her benefits were decreased. Other environmental/programmatic challenges included limited space (i.e., the building was too small) and groups that were too large to properly accommodate the person with a developmental disability.

Areas of Growth for the Employees with Developmental Disabilities

In addition to the challenges faced in the workplaces, the employers also discussed how the employees with disabilities benefitted from their inclusion. According to the employers, seven of the individuals with developmental disabilities displayed an increase in self-confidence throughout their job placements.

I mean, she knows her job now, so over the years you can see that, I mean, when she's walking down the hall, she's not walking idly. She's going somewhere; she knows where she's going; she knows what she has to do (employer of 63 year old female).

The employees with disabilities had a sense of purpose because of their employment and were proud of their jobs.

Furthermore, seven of the employers described the skill acquisition that occurred because of the inclusion in the workplaces. Persons with developmental disabilities were able to gain valuable work and life skills during their employment experiences.

But I think probably more of that educational aspect and just being able to try new things and to continue to challenge her and to learn and to have new opportunities to be challenging herself to grow and attain goals (employer of 44 year old female).

The work experiences of these individuals exposed them to things that they may not have had the opportunity to experience otherwise.

Thirdly, four employers stated that their employees with developmental disabilities were able to have richer social lives because of their inclusion in the work settings.

And I think she's also kind of just been more involved and had more opportunities since she started coming here, because when she was in the [program], she wasn't really doing a lot; she was kind of sitting around, and I think she's happier when she's out and doing things. So I think that there's been an improvement in the amount of activities she's involved with and the amount of even just the day classes (employer of 30 year old female).

The work environments provided structured social settings and opportunities for social interactions.

Benefits to the Workplace

According to the employers, not only did the employees with disabilities benefit from their workplace inclusion but so did all others involved in the workplace. All employees described the individuals with disabilities as having great personalities that added to the workplace, thus increasing the morale in the work environment.

From my standpoint, it's definitely a pleasure to kind of be here. She brings a lot of life, and she's a funny person. She's got a sense of humor, and I think from her peers and from the building, people enjoy just spending time with her, and generally she makes the place a more fun place to be (employer of 22 year old female).

Moreover, the employees with disabilities were described as positive role models. They were able to role model to others facing challenges, those both with and without disabilities. In one case, an employee with a developmental disability was working for a program that served

families of children with disabilities, and she was able to act as a positive role model for the families and the children.

Well, I would say actually as I mentioned before when [she] was reading to the kids, so for some parent/guardians this would be a precious moment to see how my child in the future can work with children and can be a whole productive member of the society, and that's a dream come true (employer of 28 year old female).

Increased efficiency was named by two employers as an important benefit of having the employees with disabilities in the workplace. The persons with disabilities were able to complete tasks that would otherwise be added to somebody else's job description. This freed up more time for others to focus on additional tasks.

But it was just to take away from some duties for the night people that we delegated to him, and he felt important. He did free me up from certain things. He would go to the bank for me the odd time to get change; he would do all my deposits. So that was a growth. I mean, it freed up a lot of time for me in the daytime (employer of 61 year old male).

Finally, according to four employees, increased awareness was a benefit of workplace inclusion. The individuals with disabilities would display their capabilities and demonstrate what persons with disabilities were able to contribute to the work setting.

It really shows us just how everybody is a person. I mean, I don't know, just, it's not that we... sometimes we need reminders that some people are slower at this or that... (employer of 63 year old female).

The employers greatly appreciated the educational opportunity that including a person with a disability provided and stated that, because of their experiences, they had, themselves, learned much about developmental disabilities and inclusion.

Discussion

Previously, the inclusion of persons with disabilities has been viewed as an issue relevant to only the educational system. However, with the recent push for “authentic inclusion” (Andrews & Lupart, 2000; Ferguson, 1997) and current research showing the importance of inclusion across the lifespan (Irvine & Lupart, 2007; Irvine, 2007), greater emphasis has been placed on work placements for adults with developmental disabilities. Interviews with employers of persons with developmental disabilities shed light on several issues pertaining to inclusion in the workplace. Several strategies to assist the persons with developmental disabilities in being fully included were discussed. Some strategies required special equipment, staffing, or formal meetings while other strategies were less formal and could be integrated naturally into the work environments. Despite the use of these strategies, however, several challenges were still present in the workplaces. Some of these challenges were internal to the individuals with developmental disabilities (e.g., physical impairments) while others were external challenges within the environments or work programs. These difficulties did not, however, prevent the persons with disabilities from showing areas of growth. During their employment, many of the employees with disabilities made large gains in both emotional and task-oriented areas. Moreover, many benefits to the workplace were reported, thus showing that inclusion not only benefits the individuals with developmental disabilities; it benefits everyone involved.

Limitations

Within this research there are a few limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the design of the study itself limits the extent to which the results are generalizable across all work sites. Conducting an inquiry across a larger number of employers would assist in distinguishing which findings are common in the larger population and which are due to type of disability, gender, or individual experience.

A second possible limitation is the bias that may have been present within this particular group of participants. Employers were invited to participate in a study that was focussed on better understanding the

inclusion of persons with developmental disabilities. It, therefore, drew the attention of employers who were biased in favour of inclusive ideology and practices. It is unlikely that employers opposed to inclusion would volunteer for such a study. This consideration suggests that the sample in this project may be positively biased toward inclusion, which might have omitted some of the issues that would arise in the lives of individuals who have had negative experiences with inclusion.

Future Directions

The findings of this research clearly identified several challenges that were encountered in the work environments. Two such challenges were behavior difficulties and a lack of social skills. It is suggested that employers implement work preparation programs to overcome these difficulties. If the employee with a disability can be educated on what to expect in the work settings and what behavior is considered appropriate, then he/she can be set up for greater success in the work settings. One component to such a program would be social skills training. This training can be specific to the work site in question and can be completed through collaboration between the employers and supporting agencies.

Additionally, instead of only preparing the individuals for the work environments, it is also important to prepare the environments for the inclusion of persons with developmental disabilities. Typically, inclusion is seen as a service for persons with disabilities, not as a way of life for all in the community. Communities need to be educated on the benefits of employing persons with disabilities. With the increased morale, positive role modeling, and increased efficiency that employees with developmental disabilities can bring to the work places, businesses can run at optimum. Educating the community to these benefits can allow for more positive attitudes towards persons with disabilities and diminish misconceptions about the abilities of persons with developmental disabilities. Furthermore, employers and supporting agencies can broaden their view of the job opportunities available to persons with developmental disabilities. Often, persons with disabilities are "slotted" into stereotypical positions but, as seen in the experiences of the employers in this project, persons with disabilities often have skills and strengths that would be useful in a variety of settings.

Thirdly, a greater focus on informal supports for finding employment is recommended. In this research, five of the employees with developmental disabilities found employment with support from their parents and two individuals found employment independently. While the majority of persons with disabilities found employment through agencies, the remaining individuals showed that it is possible to find employment using other avenues. Agency support, particularly in small communities, is not always readily available. Therefore, it is important for researchers and professionals to explore other less formal support systems that persons with disabilities can rely on when searching for employment. In addition, persons with developmental disabilities should be encouraged and taught to self-advocate so they do not always have to rely on an external support in their job hunt. Many individuals with developmental disabilities are able to effectively self-advocate if given the right tools and support.

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Footnote

¹Portions of this work were part of the first author's dissertation research; therefore, some parts of the paper may have close resemblance to components of the dissertation literature review.