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The Family Employment Awareness Training (FEAT): A Mixed-method Follow-up

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Abstract

BACKGROUND: Although competitive employment (i.e., employment in community settings among peers without disabilities for minimum wage or higher) is associated with numerous benefits for individuals with disabilities (Johannesen, McGrew, Griss, & Born, 2007), people with disabilities are underrepresented in the competitive workforce (National Disability Rights Network, 2011).

OBJECTIVES: This study sought to determine the longer-term effectiveness of the Family Employment Awareness Training (*FEAT*) on the expectations and knowledge of participants who attended the program in 2010-2011. The study also sought to explore the perceptions of families who attended the program.

METHODS: We distributed a *FEAT* Follow-up Survey to 220 participants to evaluate the program's longer-term influence on participants' expectations and knowledge and conducted 13 semi-structured interviews using a *FEAT* Interview Protocol to explore families' perceptions.

RESULTS: Study findings indicated that participants who attended *FEAT* rated their expectations as average and rated their knowledge above average one to two years after attending *FEAT*. An analysis of interview data indicated that families described several aspects of *FEAT* they liked, aspects they disliked, and suggested improvements for the program.

CONCLUSIONS: Results from this study indicate that *FEAT* is a promising approach to improving competitive employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Keywords: competitive employment, training, knowledge, expectations, supported employment

The Family Employment Awareness Training (*FEAT*): A Mixed-method Follow-up

I. Introduction

Competitive employment (i.e., employment in community settings among peers without disabilities for minimum wage or higher) enhances independence, provides a sense of purpose, and positively influences self-esteem, social skills, and interpersonal relationships (Johannesen, McGrew, Griss, & Born, 2007). However, people with disabilities who have individualized support needs [people with physical or mental impairments that seriously limit one or more functional capacities (Rehabilitation Act, 1973)] that require services and supports in the workplace (Buntinx et al., 2008) often do not reap these benefits because they have jobs in segregated settings or are unemployed (National Disability Rights Network, 2011). Further, those employed in competitive settings typically work only part-time, earn less than living wages, and do not receive benefits such as paid vacation or health care (Hendricks & Wehman, 2009; Mank, 2007).

There are numerous barriers to competitive employment for people with individualized support needs (ISN), including discrimination, intensity of support needs, and the struggling economy (Blitz & Mechanic, 2006; National Council on Disability, 2009). However, two barriers are especially prevalent and problematic. The first is low expectations for competitive employment (Chambers, Hughes, & Carter, 2004; Corbière, Mercier, & Lesage, 2004; Hall & Fox, 2004; Hasnain & Balcazar, 2009; National Council on Disability, 2010; National Disability Rights Network, 2011). The second is inadequate knowledge of available services and supports (Baker, 2008; Hall & Parker, 2010; Larson et al., 2011; Timmons, Hall, Bose, Wolfe, & Winsor, 2011).

1.1. The importance of expectations and knowledge

Although employment rates of people with ISN appear dismal (Schmidt & Smith, 2007; Schur, Kruse, & Blanck, 2005), high expectations and knowledge can increase the likelihood of employment (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2011). High expectations among families, people with ISN, educators, and employment professionals increases the likelihood that people with ISN will attain competitive employment (Blitz & Mechanic, 2006; Cimera, 2008; Heiman, 2002; Lindstrom, Doren, & Miesch, 2011; Migliore, Grossi, Mank, & Rogan, 2008; Schmidt & Smith, 2007; Timmons et al., 2011). High familial expectations for employment have resulted in people with ISN being five times more likely to gain employment (Carter et al., 2011). Individuals with ISN who feel encouraged and optimistic about their abilities and about working are more likely to find employment (Blitz & Mechanic, 2006; Schmidt & Smith, 2007). Expectations of educators such as teachers and transition coordinators also positively influence competitive employment outcomes of people with ISN (Migliore, Mank, Grossi, & Rogan, 2007). Similarly, expectations of employment professionals (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation counselors) influence the types of jobs people with ISN experience (Burge, Ouellette-Kuntz, & Lysaght, 2007; Timmons et al., 2011).

Expectations are important, but people with ISN and their families also need knowledge of employment services and supports to fulfill their expectations for competitive employment. By connecting families and people with ISN with appropriate services and supports, informed school staff can enhance the knowledge of families and people with ISN and increase the number of people with ISN who use employment services and supports (National Disability Rights Network, 2011; Timmons et al., 2011; Winsor et al., 2011). Employment professionals' knowledge of employment laws, accommodations, services and supports, and disability-related benefits can also increase employment outcomes by increasing the frequency of people with ISN

accessing these services and supports (Dutta et al., 2008; Winsor et al., 2011). Schools and

employment professionals can also support families and people with ISN by informing them

about employment services and supports and facilitating transitions from school to work

(National Disability Rights Network, 2011).

Knowledge-based training programs are effective at improving expectations and

knowledge (Deutschlander, 2010; Hall, 2007; Hessing, Arcand, & Frost, 2004; Ison et al., 2010;

Shriner, Schlee, Hamil, & Libler, 2009; Sprague et al., 2012). However, a literature review on

peer-reviewed articles published between 2000-2012 describing reasonably brief (i.e., no more

than five sessions) face-to-face trainings designed to increase expectations and/or knowledge

revealed several shortcomings in the research of these training programs. For example, although

the training programs offered various instructional methods (e.g., lectures, small group

activities), only one training program identified in the review offered participants follow-up

technical assistance or follow-up training sessions (Migliore, Butterworth, Nord, & Gelb, 2011).

No knowledge-based training programs (a) focused on expectations and knowledge related to

competitive employment; (b) targeted families, professionals, and people with ISN as

participants; and (c) included follow-up data. By contrast, the Family Employment Awareness

Training (*FEAT*) in Kansas is an example of a knowledge-based training program for people

with ISN, their families, and professionals (e.g., educators and employment professionals)

designed to improve competitive employment outcomes by raising employment expectations and

increasing knowledge of employment services and supports.

1.2. The Family Employment Awareness Training (FEAT)

University researchers and state Parent Training and Information (PTI) Center leaders

partnered to create *FEAT* in 2010. These partners designed *FEAT* for families, including the

member with ISN. The *FEAT* team also encouraged professionals to attend to increase

collaboration among families and professionals. The program provided attendees with real-life

examples of successful competitive employment, information on employment services and

supports, and opportunities to network with each other and with various guest speakers

(including competitively employed individuals with ISN, employers, and local agency

representatives). Table 1 provides an outline of the *FEAT* curriculum and training activities.

<<insert Table 1>>

We conducted six *FEAT* trainings in 2010 with 237 participants across Kansas.

Attendance in 2011 totaled 87 participants across five trainings. We evaluated *FEAT* in two

phases. The first involved an immediate *FEAT* Pre/Post-Questionnaire that evaluated

participants' expectations and knowledge before and after training sessions. Results indicated

that participants' expectations for competitive employment and knowledge of employment

services and supports increased from pre- to post-training (Francis, Gross, Turnbull, & Parent-

Johnson, 2013). However, the longer-term influence of *FEAT* remained unclear. Therefore, we

conducted a second phase of evaluation.

In the second phase, we distributed a *FEAT* Follow-up Survey to participants one to two

years after attendance. We also interviewed family units who attended the training. The purpose

of this study was to determine the longer-term effectiveness of *FEAT* on participants'

expectations and knowledge. Although phase one evaluation data indicated that 2010/2011

participants experienced immediate increases in expectations and knowledge, we anticipated that

these perceptions may change over time as individuals experienced barriers to competitive

employment, including discrimination, wait lists for services such as job coaches, low

expectations from community employers, and stress (Morgan & Alexander 2005; Olson, Cioffi,

Yovanoff, & Mank, 2001; National Disability Rights Network, 2011; Schmidt & Smith, 2007;

Shier, Graham, & Jones 2009). For this study, we considered *FEAT* successful if participants

rated their expectations and/or knowledge at or above "average."

Exploring perceptions of families (the group most likely to influence competitive

employment outcomes; Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, 2000;

Rupp & Ressler, 2009; Timmons et al., 2011) who attended *FEAT* regarding the longer-term

influence of *FEAT* on their expectations and knowledge could warrant the program's

continuation and/or provide information to improve future trainings. In this study, we discuss the

findings from phase two evaluation related to the following research questions:

(a) Do participants rate their expectations for competitive employment at or above

"average?";

(b) Do participants rate their knowledge of employment services and supports and types of

competitive employment at or above "average?"; and

(c) What are families' perceptions of *FEAT*?

2. Method

We distributed a *FEAT* Follow-up Survey and conducted semi-structured interviews to

determine (a) the longer-term influence of *FEAT* on participants' expectations and knowledge

and (b) families' perceptions of *FEAT*.

2.1. Participants

We identified participants using the 2010-2011 *FEAT* database. We distributed a

recruitment letter and *FEAT* Follow-up Survey in English and Spanish to 220 participants who

provided contact information when they registered for *FEAT*. In total, 114 participants returned

surveys, yielding a response rate of 52%. We omitted six surveys from the analysis because

participants marked "did not attend *FEAT*" (i.e., they registered in advance but did not attend), leaving a final sample of 108. All but one of the surveys in the final sample was in English.

Families (e.g., parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts and uncles, foster parents, spouses, caregivers, and family members with ISN) were the largest participant group (n=68). Professionals (e.g., case managers, social workers, employment/transition specialists, teachers) comprised the second largest participant group (n=31). Individuals with ISN (i.e., people with ISN who completed the survey individually rather than with their family) were the smallest participant group (n=8). Seven participants did not identify their roles. Table 2 provides demographics for participants and comparisons to Kansas demographics from the U.S. Census. <<insert Table 2>>

In the survey, we offered family units the opportunity to participate in a follow-up interview; 26 families volunteered. We sought families to participate in interviews because (a) the training was designed for families; (b) families comprised the largest participant group; and (c) families are the most influential people in the lives of individuals with ISN (Timmons et al., 2011). These facts warrant attention to these stakeholders' needs and perceptions. To gain a more complete understanding of families' perceptions across a spectrum of characteristics (e.g., different levels of need, different types of employment), we purposefully selected cases for maximum diversity (Merriam, 2009). We interviewed families until we reached saturation (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), yielding 13 interviews.

Interviewee demographic information is largely representative of the demographics for Kansas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), with the exception of higher levels of education and income represented in the sample for this study. Table 3 displays demographic information for interviewees, organized by criteria for selection.

<<insert Table 3>>

2.2. Instrument design and implementation

We used two instruments, a *FEAT* Follow-up Survey and a *FEAT* Interview Protocol, to collect data on the longer-term influence of *FEAT*.

2.2.1. FEAT Follow-up Survey

We collected data through (a) a paper survey mailed through the U.S. Postal Service or (b) a web-based survey through the online program Qualtrics. We followed the research-based methods outlined by Dillman and colleagues (2009) to create and distribute the survey, and tracked participant responses via individual identification numbers to avoid duplication. We developed Expectations and Knowledge Scales for the *FEAT* Follow-up Survey using qualitatively analyzed open-ended survey responses from the *FEAT* Pre/Post-Questionnaires and a review of relevant literature.

The *FEAT* Follow-up Survey included an Expectations Scale consisting of nine 5-point Likert items about general expectations for individuals with ISN working in competitive positions. Within this scale, the phrasing of three items necessitated reverse coding. The survey also included a Knowledge Scale consisting of nine 5-point Likert items about participants' perceptions of their knowledge of employment services/supports and different types of competitive employment positions. Within this scale, the phrasing of two items necessitated reverse coding.

To ensure content and construct validity (Creswell, 2009), we pretested the Follow-up Survey using two methods: (a) recommendations from individuals with specialized knowledge (e.g., professors in special education, family members of persons with ISN, statisticians) and (b) cognitive interviews (Dillman et al., 2009). We also ensured social validity (Creswell, 2009;

Dillman et al., 2009) by integrating language from the initial Pre/Post-Questionnaires into the survey. For example, we referred to various types of competitive employment as "out-of-the-box positions," which many participants referenced on Post-Questionnaires from 2010/2011.

We provided all survey materials in English and Spanish. As Dillman and colleagues (2009) suggested, two native Spanish-speakers (one from Puerto Rico and one from Colombia) worked independently and then collaborated to translate all materials into "neutral" or "universal" Spanish (Eremenco, Cella, & Arnold, 2005). We chose this method to ensure that (a) words and concepts were accurately and consistently conveyed across both versions of the survey, and (b) Spanish surveys were translated into a form of Spanish that speakers of all dialects and cultural backgrounds were likely to understand (i.e., neutral Spanish). The familiarity of the translators with the program (they presented *FEAT* in Spanish and translated *FEAT* training materials) and their background experiences working in the field of developmental disabilities facilitated construct and social validity (Creswell, 2009) of the translations.

2.2.2. FEAT Interview Protocol

In addition to surveys, we conducted 13 semi-structured interviews with family units (i.e., parents and their children with ISN) in person (n=7) or via telephone (n=6). We co-interviewed all but one interview. We conducted one interview with a native Spanish-speaking mother in English (which was the mother's preference and the primary language spoken in the home), with a native Spanish-speaker co-interviewing the mother.

The Interview Protocol was a product of iterative feedback from a university professor in the field of special education and three pilot interviews (Maxwell, 2005) with parents of children with ISN who presented at *FEAT* (two of whom had family members working in competitive

employment and one whose family member with ISN had not yet sought employment). We

began each interview with a brief introduction of ourselves, a description of the study and its

purpose, and an explanation of confidentiality measures. Acknowledging our university

affiliation and role in developing and conducting *FEAT*, we expressed our concern that *FEAT*

may not address the realities that many families experienced and urged participants to "hold

nothing back" to increase their comfort discussing their experiences fully and honestly. With

permission, we audio-recorded the interviews, which lasted an average of 74 minutes (ranging

between 48 and 116 minutes long). For this manuscript, we limit the results and discussion to

data related to families' perceptions of and suggested improvements for *FEAT*.

2.3. Analysis

We used SPSS statistical software to analyze quantitative data derived from the *FEAT*

Follow-up Survey and report reliability tests and single sample *t* tests. To ensure the survey's

internal reliability, we reverse-coded appropriate items and conducted reliability tests on the

Expectations and Knowledge scales (Green & Salkind, 2008). We used single sample *t* tests to

determine if the mean for the Expectations and Knowledge Scales differed significantly from the

midpoint of the scales (i.e., a neutral score of "3" or "average"). Single sample *t* tests are often

used to "evaluate whether the mean on a test variable is significantly different" from a test point

(e.g., "a neutral point") on a scale (Green & Salkind, 2008, p. 163).

We used NVivo software to employ basic interpretative qualitative analysis for

transcribed interview data (Merriam, 2002). Using NVivio, we reviewed all transcribed interview

data to identify general themes found among and across questions and responses (Creswell,

2009). We then coded the data by placing interview content into categories, clustering similar

categories together, identifying unique or irrelevant topics, and assigning codes to the data.

Using this process, we determined if any new categories emerged or if current codes were

appropriate, and recoded the data as necessary.

We used several methods to ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative analysis

(Maxwell, 2005). The first method was transcript checks (comparing written transcripts to

original interview recordings; Creswell, 2009). Prior to analyzing interview data, we checked

each transcript line by line with the original recording to ensure accuracy. Peer debriefing

(reviewing and questioning interpretations of qualitative data with colleagues) was the second

method (Creswell, 2009). We collaborated weekly to examine and discuss preliminary findings,

other perspectives and potential data interpretations. This process prevented coder drift, thus

increasing consistency of the codes (Fernald & Duclos, 2005). Last, we used comparison (i.e.,

comparing data across environments, individuals, or time; Maxwell, 2005). Comparing data from

families with diverse experiences enabled us to consider threats to trustworthiness.

3. Results

This study sought to (a) determine *FEAT*'s longer-term influence on participants'

expectations and knowledge by distributing a *FEAT* Follow-up Survey and (b) gather

information on perceptions of *FEAT* in semi-structured interviews with families using the *FEAT*

Interview Protocol.

3.1 Expectations for competitive employment

3.1.1. Reliability

We computed a reliability analysis for the Expectations Scale on the *FEAT* Follow-up

Survey. Based on this analysis, we excluded one item from the Expectations Scale, resulting in

eight remaining items with a coefficient alpha of .80, indicating satisfactory reliability.

3.1.2. Single sample t test

We conducted a single sample *t* test on the Expectations Scale to determine whether participants rated their expectations at or above "average" (a three on the scale). The sample mean of 3.10 (*SD*=.67) did not differ significantly from 3.00, *t(103)*=1.10, *p*=.30. The effect size *d* of .10 indicated a small effect (Cohen, 1988). We conducted post hoc power analyses using G*Power (Erdfelder, Faul, & Buchner, 1996) to determine if these non-significant results were due to a lack of statistical power. Power analysis determined that for the effect size of .10 observed for this *t* test, this study would need an n of approximately 30 participants to achieve statistical power at .80. Therefore, sample size was not the cause of these non-significant results.

3.2. Knowledge of employment services and supports

3.2.1. Reliability

We computed a reliability analysis for the Knowledge Scale. Based on this analysis, we excluded three items from the Knowledge Scale, resulting in six items with a coefficient alpha of .88, indicating satisfactory reliability.

3.2.2. Single sample t test

 As with expectations, we also conducted a single sample *t* test on the Knowledge Scale to determine whether participants rated their expectations at or above "average" (a three on the scale). The sample mean of 3.68 (*SD*=.73) differed significantly from 3.00, *t(103)*=9.51, *p<.001*. The effect size *d* of .68 indicated a medium effect (Cohen, 1988).

3.3. Families' perceptions of FEAT

Our analysis of interview data indicated that families reported aspects of *FEAT* they liked and disliked. Families also provided several suggested improvements for *FEAT*.

3.3.1. Likes

Families identified three major themes regarding aspects of *FEAT* they liked. These

themes included (a) feeling inspired by stories, (b) enjoying learning new information, and (c) appreciating networking opportunities.

First, families reported leaving *FEAT* feeling inspired by stories of positive examples of successful competitive employment. Several families noted that *FEAT* "opened their eyes" or gave them a "light bulb moment" when they learned about "outside of the box" options for competitive employment that the stories illustrated. Families also specifically cited several success stories, making remarks such as, "I'm thinking why can't [family member with ISN] do something like that?" Several families also mentioned that the stories "encouraged" them to seek various types of employment, including options "other than just sheltered day services."

Second, families enjoyed learning new information from *FEAT* in ways that "cater a little better [to] parents." Participants also liked that *FEAT* clarified information of which they were aware, but found confusing or had forgotten. One participant remarked that, "We knew about some of that stuff, but we hadn't seen it in a while." Another family also stated that information from *FEAT* allowed them to realize that "there is a lot of help out there."

Third, families appreciated the opportunities for networking. As one family put it, "Who you know is more important than who you don't know." While talking about networking at *FEAT*, another family remarked that, "it is just so good to meet people" and "see people coming together…because otherwise it's just on paper." One father even reported finding a much-needed service provider while networking during *FEAT*:

> We were just talking to other families and saw somebody we didn't know. We were
>
> looking for a youth support worker. They recommended a guy's name, who was with us
>
> for a year and a half and was a godsend.

A mother said she was glad she went to *FEAT* because she was able to network with community

employers, which resulted in a volunteer opportunity for her family member with ISN.

3.3.2. Dislikes

Families identified three primary themes regarding aspects of *FEAT* they disliked, all of which involved information the program provided: (a) the failure of the curriculum to match the needs of their families/family members, (b) the gap between *FEAT's* information and real world opportunities, and (c) information overload.

First, some families reported the *FEAT* curriculum did not match the needs of their family/family members. Although families liked the stories of successful competitive employment, some families expressed there was too much emphasis on self-employment for individuals with ISN. Families noted this was problematic because most families do not have time or resources to help family members with ISN run small businesses: "You know some of your examples [of entrepreneurship], I'm going great, if that's all I could do." Two families also mentioned that *FEAT*'s curriculum was too geared to individuals with significant support needs, since many of the stories and much of the information discussed at *FEAT* did not apply to their family members with fewer support needs.

Second, some families indicated that there was a gap between information and materials *FEAT* presented and actualization of *FEAT* content. One mother of two adult family members with autism discussed the "gap" between information and reality: "There's so much in between [*FEAT*] and actually putting our kids behind a job. It's a huge gap there." Other families reported that, although stories and information they learned about at *FEAT* were helpful and inspiring, they quickly found they needed more support to actualize competitive employment outcomes. For example, a mother reflected on the difficulty she experienced navigating the services and supports discussed at *FEAT* saying, "I am confused about what comes first and then second…. it

just seems very confusing to me about how to put the systems together and at what age."

Third, although families appreciated the information they learned at *FEAT*, they reported feeling "overwhelmed" by the amount of information discussed during trainings. One parent discussed feeling "discouraged rather than encouraged after [*FEAT*] because there was a lot of information, a lot of resources and then [she] turn[ed] around and just [went] back to work." Some families reported feeling as if they had to "wade" through the information after *FEAT* to find appropriate services and supports for their family members with ISN. This experience left those families feeling overwhelmed and discouraged. As one mother put it, "Information in this life is sad, believe me. It's sad because you feel you cannot do it any more."

3.3.3. Suggested improvements

Families made several suggestions for improving the *FEAT* program. The suggestions aligned with two key themes: (a) enhancing the curriculum and (b) expanding the program.

First, families offered several suggestions for enhancing *FEAT*'s existing curriculum. For example, families discussed the need for "refresher" trainings "to clarify a few more things." Another family requested longer trainings so families could have more time to absorb information and ask questions. Other families recommended that *FEAT* include more "small group" activities "so that people can truly talk about their own situations" to make the program "applicable in the real life." Another mother suggested developing "three or four scenarios" and then taking participants step-by-step through those scenarios to demonstrate potential action plans for competitive employment. Families also suggested making *FEAT* more individualized. For example, families discussed including information geared toward individuals with fewer support needs or holding separate trainings specifically for individuals with fewer needs. A final suggestion for *FEAT* was to invite more community employers so that families walk away with

"a potential place where [their] son or daughter can work."

Second, families also made suggestions for expanding *FEAT*. Given that work and independent living go hand-in-hand, one family suggested including information about independent living options. A military family recommended expanding *FEAT* to military bases stateside and overseas since military families are often in dire need for information about life after high school. Finally, families overwhelmingly suggested that *FEAT* expand into schools. Families identified numerous benefits to bringing *FEAT* into schools, including getting teachers and families working "side-by-side," facilitating "accountability" from schools and teachers, and increasing the prevalence of families and schools "working together" to achieve successful transitions from school to work. They also noted that bringing *FEAT* into schools would benefit people with ISN by "starting [transition planning] sooner." Another mother suggested that *FEAT* should be available to all students so that they "see that capability [that students with ISN possess]." One family proposed that schools throughout Kansas employ regional *FEAT* representatives who could provide individualized support to families going through transition.

4. Discussion

This mixed methods study sought to determine the longer-term influence of *FEAT* on participants' expectations and knowledge and families' perceptions of *FEAT*.

4.1. Expectations and knowledge

We asked the research questions (a) do participants rate their expectations for competitive employment at or above "average?" and (b) do participants rate their knowledge of employment services and supports/types of competitive employment at or above "average?" Results indicated that participants who attended *FEAT* in 2010-2011 rated their competitive employment expectations for persons with ISN at "average." Results also indicated that participants who

attended *FEAT* rated their knowledge of employment services and supports above "average."

These results are encouraging because anecdotal comparisons to Pre-Questionnaire data

indicated participants generally had poor expectations and knowledge. These findings are also

interesting because families reported that they felt inspired by stories of successful competitive

employment, which we would expect to result in higher expectations. However, families

reported several concerns about information they received at *FEAT,* such as feeling

overwhelmed by information and discouraged by the "gap" between *FEAT* and reality. While

these concerns may not have affected families' knowledge ratings (even though families felt

overwhelmed, they still gained knowledge), these concerns may have influenced their

expectations ratings.

There are several possible explanations for the differences between participants'

expectations and knowledge ratings. First, the construct of knowledge is more static than

expectations. Although information is something a person either knows or does not know,

expectations can change frequently in response to various circumstances (e.g., stress, illness,

local job market, experiences in the community). Participants discussed the need for support

after attending *FEAT* and "refresher" trainings. Although *FEAT* offered technical assistance (i.e.,

problem-solving assistance provided in person, email, or over the phone) to all participants, only

36% indicated that they took advantage of this assistance on the *FEAT* Follow-up Survey. This

need for support and lack of utilization of available technical assistance also may have negatively

influenced expectations.

4.2. Families' perceptions

The third research question was "what are families' perceptions of *FEAT*?" Families

noted several aspects of *FEAT* they liked, including information, networking opportunities, and

stories of successful employment. They also described aspects they disliked, including the fit of

the *FEAT* curriculum to their family member's needs, a gap between *FEAT* and reality, and

information overload. Finally, families suggested improvements for the program, such as

enhancing the curriculum and expanding the program into schools. These suggestions provided

valuable information about the program that should be incorporated into future trainings to

improve participant outcomes.

Participants indicated that future trainings should dedicate more time to group

discussions and problem-solving sessions. *FEAT* organizers could encourage networking

between participants to improve long-term expectations. Organizers could also facilitate

competitive employment outcomes by providing participants with names and telephone numbers

of local community employers who are open to hiring individuals with ISN. Families agreed that

FEAT was beneficial and should continue and even expand, notably into schools as part of

school transition programs. These findings may also be applicable to other knowledge-based

training programs that seek to replicate or enhance outcomes that *FEAT* participants experienced.

4.3. Limitations

This study has three primary limitations. One limitation is that we are unable to directly

compare data from the Follow-up Survey to data from the Pre/Post-Questionnaires because we

measured expectations and knowledge differently. We measured the constructs differently for

phase two of the evaluation of *FEAT* so that we could run *t* tests on both constructs and validate

the Expectations and Knowledge Scales for future research. Although we cannot directly

compare data from Pre/Post-Questionnaires and results of the Follow-up Survey, comparing

results of the two studies anecdotally indicates that participants generally reported poor

expectations and knowledge before *FEAT,* higher expectations and knowledge immediately after

FEAT, and continued rating their expectations and knowledge above "poor" (a score of two on the scale) one to two years after *FEAT*.

Underrepresentation of Spanish-speaking participants is a second limitation. Although the percentage of Spanish-speaking participants in the phase two evaluation are comparable with their representation in Kansas (Francis et al., 2013), only one Spanish-speaking participant returned a Spanish language survey (12 Spanish-speaking participants submitted Spanish language Pre/Post-Questionnaires). This low representation occurred despite providing all survey materials in both English and Spanish and the translation of materials into "neutral Spanish."

Third, the demographics of the sample limits generalization. While the race/ethnicities and languages spoken by participants in the sample are largely comparable with the population of Kansas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), other characteristics, including level of education and, to some degree, income were not. For example, 88.3% of survey participants and 100% of interviewees went to college, compared 61.1% of the general population in Kansas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Only one participant who did not go to college offered to participate in an interview, but we were unable to contact her. Further, while the percentage of *FEAT* participants who reported household incomes of $75,000 or more a year is comparable to Kansas demographics (44.2% of survey respondents and 45% of interviewees, compared to 41.7% of Kansans), there is a discrepancy between percentage of participants who reported incomes of $24,000 or lower (3.8% of survey respondents and 0% of interviewees, compared to 14.7% of Kansans; U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). Despite these limitations, this study fills many gaps in the literature on knowledge-based trainings.

4.4. Contributions to the literature

Findings from this study enhance the knowledge-based intervention literature in several

ways. First, this study focuses on expectations and knowledge related to competitive

employment; targets families, professionals, and individuals with ISN as participants; and

examines follow-up data. Of the seven studies included in the literature review, only 43% of

research on knowledge-based training programs measured long-term retention of expectations

and/or knowledge, and none measured outcomes past one year. Further, only 29% of studies on

knowledge-based training programs used mixed-methods design. Of those, only 14% collected

face-to-face qualitative data from participants. Professionals developing knowledge-based

programs can integrate suggestions for improvement from families participating in *FEAT* to their

knowledge-based trainings (e.g., more time for discussion).

4.5. Future directions for FEAT

The findings from this study give credence to the longer-term effectiveness of *FEAT*, thus

warranting the program's continuation and expansion. However, in doing so, the *FEAT* team

should consider families' suggestions. Based on families' feedback, we concluded that future

FEAT trainings should: (a) place more balanced interest on all types of employment; (b) share

stories of individuals with more diverse levels of need; (c) allow more time for questions; (d)

include more information for individuals with fewer support needs; (e) create more time for

interactive activities (e.g., problem solving by small groups); and (f) emphasize and expand

follow-up technical assistance included in the current design. Future *FEAT* trainers should

consider calling participants after *FEAT* to remind them that technical assistance is available.

FEAT should invite local families (Colosi & Dunifon, 2003) to serve in leadership roles

(Hepburn, 2004) where they collaborate with program staff to design trainings and present

material in ways that families understand. Last, in addition to offering follow-up technical

assistance, *FEAT* should also consider facilitating parent-to-parent connections (Kerr &

McIntosh, 2000) and creating communities of practice (Mansell & Beadle-Brown, 2004) to

enhance understanding. We believe these changes will prevent or mitigate information overload.

A common recommendation from families was to bring *FEAT* into schools to support

transition planning. The *FEAT* team could collaborate with local school districts to modify the

program and adapt it to be a professional development program for school staff and/or a

transition curriculum for students with ISN. Expanding *FEAT* into schools would provide a

sustainable foundation for teachers to empower their students, inform their students' families,

and encourage their involvement in the transition process. Although this study provided

information on *FEAT*'s longer-term influence and on how to enhance the program, future

research can fill gaps in knowledge about *FEAT*'s effectiveness and knowledge-based training

programs.

4.6. Future research

We were only able to find one study (Hessing et al., 2004) that investigated the impact of

a knowledge-based training program on expectations, knowledge, and behavioral change.

However, a preliminary analysis of additional information from the Follow-up Survey indicated

that (a) several participants reported competitive employment after *FEAT*, (b) a majority of

participants reported using information and materials from *FEAT* following attendance, and (c)

most participants reported that *FEAT* influenced or strongly influenced their work toward

competitive employment for individuals with ISN (Francis, 2013). Although these results are

encouraging, future research should continue exploring the effectiveness of knowledge-based

training programs such as *FEAT* in facilitating participants to take action. Moreover, since *FEAT*

is a Kansas-specific training program, future research should involve expanding the *FEAT*

program to reach more states, including military bases. Research on *FEAT's* expansion to other

states, military bases, and schools would determine if the program is effective among various

populations and in diverse variations.

A limitation of this study was our inability to compare findings to the Pre/Post-

Questionnaires findings. Future research should measure variables consistently, using both

quantitative (e.g., scales and questionnaires) and qualitative (e.g., interviews and focus groups)

methods. Validation of the survey used in this study will provide a reliable measurement tool for

future *FEAT* research and for researchers to reference as they evaluate other knowledge-based

training programs.

The literature on knowledge-based training programs also discussed the need for future

research to consider mediating or confounding variables (Hall, 2007; Hessing et al., 2004; Ison et

al., 2010) such as intensity of needs, socioeconomic status, and first language. Future research

may consider conducting multivariate regression of variables such as income, levels of

education, and types of disability on outcomes such as competitive employment.

Research in this area should also include more diversity among participants. In fact, the

underrepresentation of Spanish-speaking participants and participants from varied

socioeconomic statuses and educational backgrounds mark limitations of this study. To

encourage greater participation in follow-up research from Latino families who attend

knowledge-based training programs, future researchers should consider (a) calling families

personally to explain the importance family input and how the information they provide will

influence others (Quezada, Díaz, & Sánchez, 2003); (b) spreading information through parent-to-

parent connections and support groups; (c) collaborating with schools to inform families; or (d)

visiting families in their homes to encourage attendance (Hepburn, 2004). Additionally, although

we interviewed families because of the influence they have on competitive employment

outcomes of people with ISN (Timmons et al., 2011), it would be helpful in future research to interview professionals and people with ISN apart from their families to generate a more complete picture of stakeholder perceptions.

It is also important to consider that despite the fact that 100% of interview participants went to college (38% obtained a graduate degree), participants stated that *FEAT* information made them feel overwhelmed. One father imagined how difficult it must be for "that single mother" who does not have the education, support, and financial means that his family experiences. Future research should incorporate the strategies discussed in the "future directions for *FEAT*" section to ease participants feeling overwhelmed, especially those who have not had access to post-secondary education.

Last, Ison et al. (2010) called for research to determine whether knowledge-based training programs succeed in affecting how participants perceive barriers. Future research should determine the ability of these programs to change how participants perceive barriers. Similarly, more research on why participants rated their expectations lower than their knowledge (especially given the excitement they expressed about the employment success stories) would contribute to an understanding of (a) barriers that individuals experience; (b) the influence of those barriers on individuals' expectations, knowledge, and behavior; and (c) how knowledge-based training programs such as *FEAT* can address these barriers. Research on barriers that families and individuals with ISN frequently experience when seeking competitive employment and on how they overcome those barriers could also support change to local and national policies and systems.

5. Conclusion

Despite the benefits associated with competitive employment (Johannesen et al., 2007),

many individuals with ISN are unemployed, work part-time, or work in sheltered settings (National Disability Rights Network, 2011). However, high expectations for competitive employment and knowledge of employment services and supports can improve employment rates (Cimera, 2008; Heiman, 2002; Lindstrom et al., 2011; Migliore et al., 2008; Winsor et al., 2011). The results of this study on the longer-term influence of *FEAT* indicated that participants who attended *FEAT* rated their expectations as average and their knowledge above average one to two years after attending *FEAT*. This is encouraging because anecdotal comparisons to Pre-Questionnaire data indicated participants generally had poor expectations and knowledge (Francis et al., 2013). This study indicates that *FEAT* is a promising approach to improving employment outcomes for individuals with ISN. Additionally, continued implementation of *FEAT* and future research will contribute to the literature on knowledge-based training programs.

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Table 1

FEAT Curriculum Topics, Sub-topics, and Training Activities

Topics	Sub-topics	Training Activities
Supported and customized competitive employment options	Carved jobs Created jobs Resource ownership Self-employment Business within a business Employer-initiated models	Lecture (PowerPoint, videos, success stories) Community speakers (employees, employers, and entrepreneurs) Small group activity (job preferences) Youth session (job preferences and support needs)
Family role in supporting employment	Building a support network Contributing to the employment process Creating parent-professional partnerships	Lecture Opportunities for networking Creating an action plan for employment
Transition to adulthood	School to work Healthcare	Lecture Youth session
Support resources	Employee resources - assistive technology, natural supports, job coaches, benefits specialist Employer resources - local and national organizations providing services and supports to employers of persons with ISN	Lecture Community speakers (organization and agency representatives) Resource CD
Systems navigation	Case managers Career one-stop/Workforce centers	Lecture Community speakers (organization

		and agency representatives)
Employment services and supports	Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)	Lecture
	Ticket to Work	Community speakers (organization
	Kansas Medicaid (i.e., waivers and buy-in programs)	and agency representatives)
	Community rehabilitation providers	Resource CD
	Transportation	Opportunities for networking
	Work incentives (e.g., PASS, IRWE, 1619b)	Small group activity (support needs and resources)
Funding and information	Kansas Council on Developmental Disabilities	Lecture
	Small Business Administration (i.e., development centers, SCORE, women's business centers)	Community speakers (organization and agency representatives)
	Kansas Disability Service Maps	Resource CD
Antidiscrimination policy	Federal (i.e., Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504)	Lecture
	State (i.e., Employment First policy, Kansas Act Against Discrimination)	Youth sessions (disability disclosure and self-advocacy)
		Resource CD

Note. FEAT curriculum. Adapted from "Evaluating the Effectiveness of the Family Employment Awareness Training in Kansas: A Pilot Study," by G.F. Francis, J.M.S. Gross, R. Turnbull, and W. Parent-Johnson, 2013, *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 38,* p. 3. Copyright 2013 by TASH. Adapted with permission.

Table 2

Demographic Information for FEAT Participants and Comparison with Kansas Census

	Families	Individuals with ISN[a]	Professionals[b]	
	n=68	n=8	n=31	
Primary Language Use in Home				**Percent in Kansas**
English	96.7	100		89.3
Spanish	1.7	-		
Other	1.7 (American Sign Language)	-		
Race/Ethnicity				**Percent in Kansas**
White/Caucasian	79.3	83.3		87.4
Hispanic/Latino	6.9	-		10.8
Multiple races/ethnicities	5.2	-		2.7
Asian/Asian American	3.4	-		2.5
Black/African American	5.2	.9		6.1
Area Where You Live[c]				
Urban	23.7	50	40	
Suburban	64.4	33.3	16.7	
Rural	11.9	16.7	43.3	
Average Annual Income for Household			**Percent in Kansas**	
Below $15, 000	1.9		Below $10,000	3.6
$15, 000 - $24,999	1.9		$15, 000 - $24,999	11.1
$25,000 - $34, 999	7.7		$25,000 - $34, 999	11.2
$35,000 - $44,999	15.4		$35,000 - $49,000	15.4
$45,000 - $54,999	3.8			
$55,000 - $64,999	5.8		$50,000 - $74, 900	19.5
$65,000 - 74,999	19.2			
$75,000 - $84,999	3.8			
$85,000 - $94,999	5.8		$75,000 - $99,000	16.6
$95,000 and higher	34.6		$100,000 and higher	25.1
Highest Level of				**Percent**

Education Obtained in Household			in Kansas
High school diploma	3.4		28.4
Trade school/technical degree	8.5		n/a
Some college	8.5		24
2 year college degree	10.2		7.4
4 year college degree	37.3		19.5
Graduate degree	32.2		10.2
Age of Family Member/Individual with ISN			
Under 12 years old	3.5	-	
13-15 years old	5.3	-	
16-18 years old	24.6	16.7	
19-21 years old	29.8	-	
22-25 years old	21.1	50	
26-30 years old	5.3	16.7	
31 years old or older	10.5	16.7	
Disability of Family Member Member/Individual with ISN			
Autism	32.8	16.7	
Developmental disabilities	14.8	-	
Multiple disabilities	23	33.3	
Down syndrome	14.8	-	
Cerebral Palsy	13.1	33.3	
Attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder	1.6	-	
Hearing impairment/Deafness	-	16.7	
Level of Support Needed by Family Member Member/Individual with ISN			
None	1.8	16.7	
Minimal	17.5	33.3	
Moderate	29.8	-	
Extensive	50.9	50	

Note. Seven participants did not identify a role (e.g., family, individual with ISN, professional). Data reported in percentages. Kansas statistics were retrieved from the U.S. Census Bureau (2012).

[a]The researcher did not request information about average household income or highest level of education obtained in household from individuals with ISN.

[b]The only demographic data requested from professionals was the area in which they worked.

[c]For professionals we requested the area in which they worked.

Table 3

Demographic Information for Interview Participants

Family	Average Annual Household income	Location of family home	Highest level of education obtained in home	Primary language(s) spoken in home	Race/ Ethnicity(ies) of family members	Age of family member	Level of support needed by family member	Current employment status of family member
1.	65,000-74,900	Suburban	Graduate degree	English	White/Caucasian	20	Moderate	Competitive employment
2.	85,000-94,900	Rural	Four year college degree	English	White/Caucasian	18	Minimal	Competitive employment
3.	35,000-44,900	Suburban	Some college	English	White/Caucasian Hispanic/Latino	19	Minimal	Competitive employment
4.	95,000+	Suburban	Graduate degree	English	White/Caucasian Multiple races/ethnicities	22	Minimal	Competitive employment
5.	95,000+	Suburban	Graduate degree	English	Hispanic/Latino	23 & 24	Extensive/ Minimal	Unemployed/ Volunteer

6.	35,000-44,900	Suburban	Some college	English	White/Caucasian	17	Extensive	Internship
7.	95,000+	Urban	Four year college degree	English	White/Caucasian Multiple races/ethnicities	19	Moderate	Had, but lost job
8.	Not reported	Not reported	Four year college degree	English	Black/African American	23	Extensive	Sheltered workshop
9.	65, 00-74,900	Suburban	Four year college degree	English	White/Caucasian	27	Extensive	Sheltered workshop
10.	25,000-34,900	Urban	Some college	English	White/Caucasian	46	Minimal	Sheltered workshop
11.	95,000+	Suburban	Graduate degree	English	White/Caucasian	22	Extensive	Sheltered workshop
12.	25,000-34,900	Suburban	Two year college degree	English/ ASL	White/Caucasian Hispanic/Latino	19 & 22	Extensive/ Minimal	Not sought
13.	Not reported	Urban	Graduate degree	English	White/Caucasian	23	Extensive	Not sought

Note. Participant information organized by criteria for selection.