

Supported and Customized Employment

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It is likely someone has or will come to you wanting a job. Perhaps a friend, a consumer, a student, an acquaintance, or a colleague wants to work or change jobs. Maybe you are interested in a job or a different one. This is not surprising considering that too many people who have a disability are not working and continue to express a need for employment (Louis Harris Poll, 2004). For youth leaving school, competitive work prior to graduation or exit is the most critical factor to avoid these poor employment outcomes (Wehman, 2001; Wehman & Revell, 1997).

You may be thinking what can I do to help young adults get jobs? There is a chance you are not in a position that involves directly providing employment services. No matter what role you have, you can be a key contributor by sharing information about the possibilities and potential resources to guide others through the employment process.

How might you do that?

- *Attend a transition planning meeting*
- *Participate in an IEP, IPE, ISP or other individualized planning meeting*
- *Support self-advocacy and self-determination efforts*
- *Respond to email, telephone, or face-to-face questions*
- *Hand out written materials*
- *Link individuals to Center for Independent Living resources*
- *Be a mentor*
- *Advocate on the behalf of others*
- *Connect those who are working with those who are not*
- *Promote employment at interagency meetings and public events*
- *Share success stories*

- *Network with employment service delivery agencies*
- *Encourage pursuing of career goals*
- *Communicate the “how to’s”*
- *“Walk” others through the systems*
- *Act as a role model*
- *Assist with developing an individual “transition” portfolio*
- *Initiate employment activities while still in school*

The information that follows will provide you with what you need. Specifically, this section will describe supported and customized employment, the approaches that have been found to be successful, strategies and resources to implement the models, and personal story illustrations.

What is supported and customized employment?

Supported and customized employment are two proven approaches for assisting individuals with disabilities with becoming competitively employed (Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2004; Wehman, Sale, & Parent, 1992). The basic idea behind both is knowing what the potential employee wants and needs, what the employer wants and needs, and supporting or negotiating any differences that may exist between the two. What should people who uses these approaches expect?

- choice and active involvement
- competitive work
- typical businesses in the community
- real jobs
- comparable wages
- regular hours
- integrated work environment
- individualized supports
- job mobility and career advancement

What is Supported Employment?

Supported employment has been a service option for a long time and is responsible for many individuals working who were previously considered unemployable (Bellamy, Rhodes, Mank, & Albin, 1988; Rusch, 1990; Wehman & Kregel, 1988). It is characterized by competitive employment in community businesses with training and support provided by a skilled job coach for as long as the individual is employed. Supported employment is for those individuals who need help finding a job, intensive support to learn the job, and on-going follow-along support in order to keep their job. It is based on the premise that individuals do not have to “get ready” for work but rather receive the necessary supports that bridge the gap between their skills and the job requirements once they are employed. Job coach assistance is provided more intensely at first followed by intermittent on-going support once that individual is able to complete the job. Examples of some of the supports that may help someone perform their job are: advocacy, natural supports, assistive technology, job modifications, job carving, rehabilitation engineering, compensatory strategies, and behavioral training techniques.

What is Customized Employment?

More recently, the idea of customized employment has gained increasing attention (Callahan, 2002; Luecking & Tilson, 2002; Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2004). An initiative by the Department of Labor, customized employment is considered to be an effective approach for all individuals who have support needs as a result of their life circumstances. It is characterized by competitive employment in integrated businesses with individualized support built on the relationship between an applicant and specific employer, meeting the needs of both. It is a value exchange between the employer and employee based upon the unique needs and contributions of the individual and the discrete and emerging needs of the employer. Customized employment represents the best of what we know in terms of employing individuals with disabilities building on the proven practices of supported employment to include carved and created jobs, resource ownership, and self-employment strategies (Callahan & Rogan, 2004).

How are Supported and Customized Employment Implemented?

The first step is getting to know the individual and gathering information about his or her interests, strengths, and skills. This is sometimes called consumer assessment, vocational assessment profile, vocational profiling, or discovery. Equally important is finding out a person’s weaknesses and needs, not for the purpose of screening individuals out of employment but rather to identify the best job situation and supports. There are several ways to gather this information which are highlighted below. It is recommended that multiple sources be used to truly get to know the person.

- Talk with the individual and other key persons (e.g., build rapport, actively listen, get acquainted, share information)
- Spend time together in multiple environments (e.g., school, home, recreational activity, vocational training site)
- Facilitate the discovery or vocational profiling process (e.g., capacity description, person's picture of employment, interests and contributions) (Callahan & Garner, 1997; Shumpert, 2003)
- Conduct a person-centered career-planning meeting (Circle of Support, Perske, 1988; Making Action Plans (MAPS), Falvey, Forest, Pearpoint, Rosenberg, 1994; Personal Futures Planning, Mount, 1989; Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH), Pearpoint, O'Brien & Forest, 1993) (e.g., family, friends, professionals; plan personal future; determine individual dreams, interests, strengths, gifts, support needs and resources) (Kregel, 1998)
- Complete a community assessment (e.g., become familiar with local area, explore job and support opportunities, find out places of interest)
- Complete a situational assessment (e.g., observe work performance in three jobs at local businesses for four hours each) (Moon, Inge, Wehman, Brooke, & Barcus, 1990; Targett, 2001)
- Summarize information (e.g., Vocational Assessment Profile Form, Callahan & Garner, 1997; Situational Assessment Summary Form, Brooke, Inge, Armstrong & Wehman, 1997; Vocational Assessment Profile, Toscano, 2003) (Wehman, Sale, & Parent, 1992)
- Develop an employment plan (e.g., goals and objectives, action steps, persons responsible, timeline)

An important part of the initial planning process is an examination of individual benefits so that informed choices about work can be made. One way to do this could be to visit the Social Security office or call their 800 number listed in the telephone book. A preferred method voiced by many individuals is to meet with designated Social Security benefits planners or benefits navigators located in specific community-based organizations in each state. These positions are funded through the Benefits Planning Assistance and Outreach Program (BPAO) as a result of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999. The purpose of the BPAO projects is to assist those persons receiving Social Security with determining the impact of work on their benefits and planning the use of work incentives. The information they share can be invaluable to help make decisions about work, plan for transition, determine monetary and benefit needs, investigate Medicare/Medicaid options, and explore the use of work incentives.

Several resources can be helpful in learning more about Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits (Brooke & O'Mara, 201; Condon, Moses, Brown, & Jurica, 2003; Hammis & Griffin, 2002; Katz, 2003; Miller & O'Mara, 2003; Shelley, Hammis, & Katz, 1999; Social Security, 2004). It is always recommended that benefits assistance by a person who is up-to-date on current regulations and incentives be included as a part of the employment planning and decision-making process. A listing of work incentives for individuals interested in work is provided below (Social Security 2004 Administration).

- Impairment-Related Work Expenses
- Subsidy and Special Conditions
- Unincurred Business Expenses (self-employed only)
- Unsuccessful Work Attempt
- Earned Income Exclusion
- Student Earned Income Exclusion
- Blind Work Expenses
- Plan to Achieve Self-Support
- Special SSI Payments for Individuals who Work - section 1619a
- Continued Medicaid Eligibility – section 1619b
- Special Benefits for Individuals Under Section 1619 a or b
- Reinstating Eligibility Without a New Application
- Continued Payment under a Vocational Rehabilitation Program
- Trial Work Period
- Extended Period of Eligibility
- Continuation of Medicare Coverage
- Medicare for Individuals with Disabilities who Work

Please refer to the resource links at the end of this section which can give you detailed, specific information and examples explaining each of these work incentives. The fear of work and losing benefits or health insurance is a concern for many individuals despite their interest and desire to get a job. Meeting with a person who is knowledgeable about benefits and work will give someone the information

they need to make decisions and plan their future. It is important to note that talking with someone does not mean commitment; and individual is free to think about it and choose the path he or she wants to take. Also, even if an individual has met with someone in the past, it is suggested that another meeting be held to insure that the information is most current as work incentives and regulations change frequently.

What can you do?

- *Begin gathering assessment information*
- *Refer to adult service agencies who are responsible for assessment*
- *Promote community-based functional assessments by school personnel*
- *Encourage the individual to dream and decide his or her interests*
- *Arrange a meeting with a benefits planner or navigator*
- *Share resources and information about the process and tools*
- *Advocate for functional assessments focusing on individual abilities*
- *Help arrange a person-centered planning meeting*
- *Take the individual out in the community and different businesses to see what's there*
- *Link the person up with people you know who work in different jobs*
- *Support him or her in directing the assessment process*
- *Suggest visiting the One Stop and utilizing their employment resources*
- *Assist with sharing information at other individualized planning meetings such as the IEP, IPE, or CEP meeting*
- *Facilitate interagency sharing of assessment information*
- *Accompany the individual on a visit or referral to adult service agencies*
- *Initiate assessment activities while still in school*

The next step is finding a job. It is important to become familiar with the local labor market and the types of businesses in the community. A useful activity is to visit different companies, find out what they offer, their hiring trends, the products they produce, how they operate, and their needs and those of the industry. This information is essential for brainstorming ideas during the assessment and individualized planning meetings as well as negotiating business-oriented, cost-effective job opportunities. The assessment process should generate some ideas of where to begin the job development process. This is the time to be creative and think of possibilities based upon what the individual likes and might be interested in doing. Remember the tools and resources to create that niche and support individual efforts are available. Several strategies can be useful in developing employment opportunities.

- Conduct job development activities for the purpose of identifying and assessing competitive job opportunities (e.g., develop a marketing strategy, contact business, make employer presentations, conduct a job analysis) (Bissonnette, 1994; Callahan & Garner, 1997; Luecking, Fabian, & Tilson, 2004; Wehman, Sale, & Parent, 1992; Wehman, 2001)
- Negotiate a position of job duties that are tailored to meet the needs and strengths of the individual and the needs and demands of the business (e.g., facilitate a value exchange so that the individual brings something of value to the employer and the employer needs what the person has to offer, utilize job development and job restructuring techniques, customize that employment relationship) (Shumpert, 2004)
- Carve components of an existing job or create a new job that did not previously exist (e.g., Mary's job coach carved a job at a major hotel to include pressing napkins freeing housekeeping personnel from their cleaning and laundry tasks and insuring the restaurants lunch rush needs were met. Gerald's team created a special education aide job as a result of the public schools expressed need, Gerald's identified contributions and interests in working with kids and helping others, and the electric co-ops offer to fund a position with the schools) (Condon, Enein-Donovan, Gilmore, & Jordan, 2004; Nietupski & Hamre-Nietupski, 2001)
- Establish a position built on individual contributions through resource ownership (e.g., Martin brought a detailer, mobile trailer, and passion for washing cars to a small business owner who offered him a paid detailing position, transportation, and training. Carol brought magazine racks, magazines, and books to a coffee shop where she sells them to customers while paid by the employer who monitors her business while she is not there.) (Buxton, 2004; Parent & Coffin, 2004)
- Develop self-employment and other entrepreneur initiatives (e.g., Chris' dream job was video recording so he started his own business running a dance revolution game and video recorder within a bowling alley and is looking to expand to other recreational venues. Ronnie runs his own growing business of picking up, washing, sterilizing, and delivering towels to hair salons and barber shops using his

own equipment and vehicle (Brooks-Lane, 2004; Griffin, Flaharty, Kriskovich, Maxson, Shelley, Hammis, & Katz, 1999; Griffin & Hammis, 2003)

What can you do?

- *Become familiar with local business*
- *Join employer organizations*
- *Attend employer functions*
- *Always look for possible opportunities within businesses*
- *Talk with friends/family who work in different types of employment*
- *Look for “business needs” when you are a customer or patron*
- *Help the individual explore job possibilities*
- *Brainstorm ideas about job duties and types of businesses*
- *Share job leads*
- *Think of new business possibilities*
- *Assist with developing a resume*
- *Advocate for competitive employment and creative job situations*
- *Refer to vocational rehabilitation and employment provider agencies*
- *Initiate job development activities while still in school*

Once a job is identified, it is important to insure that all of the arrangements are made to assist the new employee with completing his or her job. Things to consider include Social Security, transportation, filling out paperwork, dress code, lunch and breaks, employee policies, company procedures, tax credits, job routines, and social culture/environment. In addition, provisions for job training and support need to be put into place beginning the first day of employment until the individual demonstrates that he or she can perform the job to the employer’s standards. A variety of training options can be used alone or in combination.

- A job coach can work side by side with the employee providing instruction, modeling for coworkers, advocating with the employer, coordinating supports, and meeting production requirements.
- Systematic instruction is a method of training involving the use of a task analysis, method of least prompts, and principles of behavior modification (Snell, 1993)
- A coworker mentor is typically a senior employee who is assigned by the company to train a new employee.
- Video or classroom training is often used by businesses to train new employees during an employee orientation process.
- Some supervisors may provide initial training to all new employees working one-on-one with the employee for a period of time.
- Workplace supports existing within the work environment may offer natural opportunities for assistance in completing the job such as supervisor guidance, posted signs, colored markers, intercom announcements, coworker prompts, employee checklists, alarms, and written instructions.
- Assistive technology in the form of low and high tech devices are available for purchase or can be developed such as alarm watches, programmed personal data assistants, elevated workstations, voice-activated computers, large print keyboards, switches, and visual alarms.

What can you do?

- *Help the individual determine his or her support preferences*
- *Encourage him or her to communicate what works*
- *Share ideas about creative support options*
- *Provide “behind the scenes” support away from the job site.*
- *Create opportunities to teach essential skills*
- *Advocate for adequate training and support*
- *Promote job coach support for as long as the individual needs it*
- *Alert key people if job site concerns arise*

- *Role play and problem-solve situations that occur at work*
- *Participate in agency and individualized planning meetings*
- *Tell individual stories to others*
- *Link with generic and disability services and supports in the community*
- *Facilitate school and adult service involvement*
- *Initiate job placement and training activities while still in school*

A unique feature of supported and customized employment is the on-going, follow-along component which insures support for as long as the individual is employed. After the individual learns the job and needs less and less job coach support, the job coach will fade from the job site monitoring work performance throughout the process. A minimum of two visits per month are provided to insure that his or her job duties are completed; to respond to changes in the individual's life that might impact work; to address issues that occur at the job site particularly changes in the environment, supervision, or job duties; and to assist with career advancement and job change opportunities. One idea is to develop an individualized on-going support plan that puts the worker in the driver's seat directing his or her future employment (Brooke, Inge, Armstrong, & Wehman, 1997; Natural Supports Transition Project, 1995). Employee and employer satisfaction are two critical elements of the on-going support provisions. It is important to note that the time spent planning and implementing the upfront components of supported and customized employment lays the critical foundation for successful long-term support.

What can you do?

- *Listen to what the individual has to say about work*
- *Monitor the employment situation*
- *Communicate issues of dissatisfaction that may arise*
- *Encourage utilization of the ongoing support plan in response to issues*
- *Insure employee satisfaction is assessed and responded to*
- *Link with agencies and supports as needed*
- *Promote increased independence*
- *Assist with developing friendships and participating in social activities*

- *Support involvement in company sponsored coworker events*
- *Advocate for career advancement and job mobility opportunities*
- *Explore quality of life issues outside of work*
- *Keep current on new technologies and employment practices*
- *Facilitate interagency transition planning*
- *Participate in school and adult service agency individualized planning meetings*
- *Initiate follow-along activities while still in school*

What can someone who is interested in employment do to get started?

Here are some ideas.

1. Determine your expectations for work
2. Explore career opportunities
3. Think about supports and assistance in your life
4. Participate in a variety of experiences
5. Learn what adult and community services have to offer
6. Meet with the Social Security benefits planner/navigator
7. Find out information about supported and customized employment
8. Talk with other individuals
9. Go to the One Stop
10. Ask questions and keep asking until you receive the information you need
11. Participate in all individualized planning meeting
12. Request a person centered employment planning meeting

13. Share your ideas and preferences with school, adult service, and supported/customized employment personnel
14. Develop a resume and/or portfolio
15. Actively participate in decisions that are made
16. Make a referral to vocational rehabilitation
17. Advocate for yourself

What are some examples of supported and customized employment outcomes?

Supported Employment

Joan is a 19 year old who is completing her last year in a public school where she is enrolled in a special education program. She has a disability label of cerebral palsy and mental retardation. Her speech is unclear and she has difficulty with reading and using money. Her education program included childcare classes and work in the school's childcare classroom. Joan's work experiences includes paid work at the skating rink, daycare, and school cafeteria; a volunteer position at a day care facility; and a helper at her churches morning childcare. She says she would like a job at the skating rink, day care center, or a restaurant.

The employment specialist and Joan completed a consumer assessment spending time together in her local neighborhood. Joan directed the employment specialist to the skating rink, mall, and a day care center. Her conversation went back to the skating rink where she spends a lot of time; however, she was told there were no openings. A situational assessment was conducted at a grocery store as a bagger and at a restaurant as a dishwasher. She thought she might like a grocery store but refused a job in a restaurant.

Joan's mother shared several leads and contacts for day care positions. The employment specialist helped Joan develop a resume and visited the day care settings she had been given. One close to Joan's home called to meet Joan and offered her a fulltime position as a teacher's aid in the one year olds classroom following her last day at school. The employment specialist completed a job analysis and made sure all of the arrangements were made for the first day of work. Joan was hired at forty hours a week earning minimum wage and receiving some benefits.

The employment specialist accompanied Joan to work to assist her. Two teachers provided training and modeled how the job should be done. Joan had difficulty identifying the children and their cubbies. The employment specialist took pictures of each child and put them on the matching cubbies. Diaper changing took too much time and Joan also had difficulty determining the correct diaper. The employment specialist taught her a system of matching the old diaper to the new and also identified some different gloves which she purchased and fit better. Joan was responsible for approximately five to eight children by herself during the last half hour of her workday. The kids would run around making supervision difficult and therefore, the job coach could not fade for that portion of her shift. The employment specialist implemented a structured activity for the kids during this time period by creating “Joan’s box” and filling it with toys and books. Joan kept it in a closet and brought it out every day at the designated time. The kids enjoyed their “new” game and would sit on the floor quietly to look through the box and play with the toys. Joan could sit with them and provide adequate care while communicating with the parents as they picked their child up

Joan performed her job well, the employer was satisfied, parents were happy, and the kids loved her. The job coach faded her time and continued visiting twice a month. Joan’s on-gong support plan involves monitoring for safety, insuring coworkers are continuing to write parent notes, enrolling Joan in community college courses, and adding new toys to “Joan’s box”.

One Stop Access to Employment

“Thank you Mr. Ingram, I have a job.” These are the words of Joseph, a 16-year-old high school student who visited a Department of Labor One Stop Career Center with his class and left with gainful employment. Joseph has always wanted to work at a local grocery store as a bagger and now is an employee of the company working 20 hours a week and earning \$5.15 an hour.

Joseph visited the One Stop with his class of 16 students, his teacher, and several assistants. The students are enrolled in a self-contained high school program and participate in a community-based vocational training and work experience program for youth with cognitive disabilities with the goal of obtaining employment and accessing the necessary supports before leaving school, one component of this program is visiting the One Stop and utilizing the resources available to anyone interested in employment. The students used the computers to play typing games, practice word and calculator skills, build a resume, and search for jobs. One student summed up the experience when asked what she like most this year, she responded, “going to the stop.”

The key to Joseph’s success...collaboration! Joseph’s employment outcome occurred as a result of the efforts of many people who all work collaboratively and were actively involved in the transition planning process. These include: vocational rehabilitation services, Department of Labor (DOL), school, community rehabilitation provider, benefits navigator, transportation department, center for independent living, and the transition council.

Here's how it happened. Joseph and the school's job coach were looking through the computer job listings and found the bagger opening at a grocery store located in the same shopping center as the One Stop. The job coach and Joseph immediately inquired and were given an application and told to come back for an interview. The teacher helped Joseph complete the application and the One Stop gave Joseph the DOL registration form. The school job coach and Joseph interviewed and Joseph was hired. The school made arrangements for their job coach to begin training at the job site for the last month remaining in the school year.

As a result of early planning, Joseph had already been referred and paperwork completed with vocational rehabilitation services and the community rehabilitation provider. The benefits navigator had met with Joseph and his family to discuss the impact of work on his Social Security and Medicaid benefits in preparation of Joseph getting a job. Therefore, supported employment funding and job coach services were already arranged by the rehabilitation counselor and community rehabilitation provider personnel before a job was found and they were ready to transition job coach support at the end of the school year.

Joseph is working and job coach support is fading but will continue with a minimum of two visits a month for the duration of his employment. The employer states that he is doing an excellent job and Joseph says he loves his job. Although Joseph is employed, he has one more year of school and will continue to work while attending school on a part-time basis.

Customized Employment

Ken is a 23-year-old male who has just completed high school with a special education certificate. He is labeled as autistic and nonverbal with behavioral issues as well as "unemployable." He loves music and is reported to exhibit fewer challenging behaviors when listening to music. A customized employment team meeting was conducted. Participants included Ken, his teacher, rehabilitation counselor, case manager, parents, members of his church, a job coach, and a musician/recorder.

Bain-storming led to the idea of self-employment in the music industry. A friend knew the owner of a coffee shop that brought in bands for entertainment. A business plan was developed with help from the Small Business Administration. Ken purchased the needed equipment with his individualized training account consisting of blended funds from a variety of sources. His purchases included sound equipment, assistive technology (communication device), a computer, and consultation with a professional from a music industry totaling \$5,939. A proposal was submitted to the owner of a coffee shop suggesting a business arrangement whereby Ken would record the bands that played at the coffee shop, edit the tapes, and sell the recordings to the band. The owner of the coffee shop liked the idea and Ken's self-employment venture known as "The Music Man" began.

The following business relationship was negotiated.

- Ken brought stereo and recording equipment to the owner of a coffee shop
- The owner offered his coffee shop as a recording studio and did not charge a fee due to increased business
- The musical acts gain exposure and do not have to pay the costs of a typical recording studio
- The Music Man has a regular venue for recording requiring no up keep on his part
- Ken edits and creates a finished product to sell to the musical acts
- The coffee shop owner provides training on music and audio equipment and markets the business to his connections in the music industry

A variety of creative supports were identified throughout the planning process. Ken's father acts as job coach and manager of his music-related job. An acquaintance who is a member of the local college student union connected Ken with student musicians. In additions, members of his church provided support and recording opportunities. It is anticipated that Ken's projected figures for the first quarter will total \$75 per month in costs and \$1.680 per month in revenue. Ken is planning to expand his business by taking his portable equipment to record musical acts in other local venues.

What resources are available to assist with supported and customized employment?

APSE The Network on Employment, <http://www.apse.org/>

Benefits Assistance Resource Center, Virginia Commonwealth University, <http://www.vcubarc.org>

Benefits Planning, Assistance, and Outreach Program,
<http://www.ssa.gov/work/serviceproviders/bpoafactsheet.html>

Employment and Disability Institute, Cornell University, www.edi.cornell.edu

Employment for All, <http://employmentforall.org/>

Griffin – Hammis Associated, LLC, <http://www.griffinhammis.com/>

March Gold & Associates, micallaham@aol.com

National Institute on Workforce and Disability/Adult, Institute on Community Inclusion, <http://www.onestops.info/>

National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, Institute for Educational Leadership, <http://www.nwd-youthinfo/index.html/>

New Freedom Initiative On-Line Resource for Americans with Disabilities
www.DisabilityInfo.gov/

Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor, <http://www.dol.gov/odep/>

Plans for Achieving Self-Support, Rural Institute on Disability, www.passplan.org

Rural Institute, University of Montana, <http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu>

Social Security Administration, www.socialsecurity.gov or www.ssa.gov/work

Social Security for Youth with Disabilities, <http://www.ssa.gov/work/youth/youth.html>

Ticket to Work, www.ssa.gov/work/Ticket/ticket_info.html

Ticket to Work, www.yourtickettowork.com/

Training Resource Network, <http://www.trninc.com/>

T-TAP Training and Technical Assistance for Providers, Virginia Commonwealth University, <http://www.t-tap.org/>

Workplacesupport.com, Rehabilitation Research & Training Center on Workplace Supports,
<http://workplacesupport.com>

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