

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT FOR TRANSITION-  
AGE YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

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>> TERRY DONOVAN: Thank you and welcome to today's session in our continuing sequence of webinars related to disability and poverty.

Today we are fortunate to have Jennifer McDonough, Project Director with Virginia Commonwealth University, who will talk to us about the effectiveness of customized employment for transition youth with disabilities.

I want to make a note, her session is approximately 40 minutes long. There will be a question and answer session at the conclusion of Ms. McDonough's presentation. And that will be managed by Heidi Decker-Maurer with Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute. My name is Terry Donovan, also with the Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute.

As Ms. McDonough is giving her presentation, please enter questions in the Q&A box that you can see. Or if you drop it into chat, that's fine. We keep track of both. At the conclusion again of Ms. McDonough's presentation we will be answering questions. Heidi and Ms. McDonough and Jennifer will be answering those questions for you.

The presentation, the entire presentation is also being recorded. That will be posted on the Project E3 website in one to two weeks. It depends on the ability -- what we like to do, we like to confirm that the recording is synchronized with the closed captioning and it takes time to get that accomplished. It takes five minutes, five minutes or so depending on where we end up. We will talk about how you can obtain CRC credits for this particular session.

With that, we will get started and thank you again for joining us. We expect another wonderful presentation.

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: Hello and welcome to today's webcast on The Effectiveness of Customized Employment for Transition-age Youth with Disabilities.

My name is Jennifer McDonough. I'm the Project Director for our customized employment research project.

Let's start by looking at our training plan for today. First I'm going to give a very short overview of customized employment. If you would like in depth training on customized employment, I highly encourage you to look at our website [www.VCURTC.org](http://www.VCURTC.org). On that website we have tons of webcasts and

even a web course that is totally dedicated to customized employment.

After that we will have a panel discussion of Employment Specialists share their experiences on customized employment. You will hear about examples of all phases of the CE process. And finally, we are going to close with some case studies that take you through each step of the customized employment process.

Let's start off with what customized employment is as defined by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. It is defined as competitive, integrated employment for an individual with a significant disability that is based on an individualized determination of the strengths, needs, and interests of the individual with a significant disability and the business needs of the employer, and carried out through flexible strategies.

Let's deconstruct this definition a little bit.

First, competitive and integrated employment. So we are talking about individuals making at least minimum wages or wages comparable to other coworkers doing similar tasks, and in a work environment with employees without disabilities. So this is not sheltered employment. This is not enclave work.

Second, individuals with significant disability. So individuals who need significant support in order to find and maintain employment. Next, based on an individualized determination of the strengths, needs, and interests of the individual. So this is a very personalized approach and very person-centered, focusing on what people can do, not what they can't.

The next part of the definition is the business needs of the employer. So customized employment really looks at the needs of the business so that it is a win-win for both the individual job seeker and the business owner or manager. This is not a charity approach to businesses. The individual with the disability is providing an actual needed service, good, or activity.

And the last part of the definition talks about carried out through flexible strategies. So the individual is not applying for open positions that are already existing in the market. And we are not using traditional job search strategies. We are really looking at networks, building relationships with businesses and utilizing strategies such as informational interviewing, working experiences, working interviews and employment proposals and job negotiation.

Next let's take a few moments to walk through the steps of the customized employment process. We are going to look at each of these more in depth. So the individual starts out in discovery. Then moves into a vocational profile or a discovery profile. Then we look at customized employment planning and

meetings around that. Followed up by the development of a portfolio or a visual resume.

Then the customized job development and negotiation and of course, accommodation and post employment support.

As you can see, these are not traditional terms that we use in the employment process. Let's look at each step.

Traditionally we would learn about an individual with a disability through a series of vocational assessments where a state vocational rehabilitation counselor might go through some assessments or send them to someone within the agency to have assessments done. This process is totally different. This is all done in the community, in locations where the customer feels most comfortable.

We use what is called discovery. And that is looking at the job seeker through personalized approaches and environments that are comfortable to that job seeker so that we can identify their skills, interests, and abilities as well as their employment conditions that they need for a job.

One of the ways we do this is through home visits. In these home visits we actually go out to their home, have conversations with the job seeker, with their family. Anybody that is in the home regularly with that job seeker.

We take a look at the environment. We observe what is going on in that environment. Is it a young adult who has certain chores that they do on a regular basis?

Often times we might see sports memorabilia scattered around the home. Is that something that the individual that we are working with has? Is that part of the family's collection? We ask that similar question to a young adult that we were working with recently. They had Virginia effect photos, scattered around. It was his sister's memorabilia but he had taken on the love of Virginia Tech as well. She was a student there and every Saturday during the fall they would go to Virginia Tech for those football games.

As part of the negotiation with his employer, it was important that we make sure that he had access to Saturdays off so that he could attend those football games with his sister.

It is also great way to observe how an individual accesses things and what types of supports they need in the home. I recently worked with a young man who had a high spinal cord injury. So he had limited use of his arms and hands. But watching him in his home, I was able to see how he accessed his remote control and his cell phone using an eraser on a pencil.

The next thing that we do is interview family, friends, and other support folks who are involved in the individual's life. This gives us a different perspective on the young person or the adult that we are working with. Often times I might see myself

one way, but my family, my friends may see me in a different light and may see strengths that I have that I didn't realize that I have. It is important to gather that information from friends and family.

It is also important to observe the individual in different environments. I know that the way my children act at home is totally different from the way that they act in the community. When they are at work they are very professional. When they are at school, they rarely talk. If you were to ask me how my kids were, I would say that they talk nonstop. But that is the difference between how I see my children and how others see my children.

It is also important that we understand the individual's cultural and social background. This can affect how the individual or the family sees work in their culture, in their home. It is also important that we understand their role in the family and in the community, and how they view certain things that are important in that community.

For example, church is really important here in the south to many of the individuals that we work with. We have some individuals who absolutely will not work on Sundays. So that is really important that we know that ahead of time so we can negotiate that with the employer. As we look at employment.

It is also important to observe the job seeker in multiple environments to collect information. We can observe them in their home, their school, in social settings as well as places that are novel to the individual.

And what can we learn from that? We can learn a lot just by taking someone to the mall. We can learn what they like, how they handle money. Are they able to make a transaction on their own? Do they use a debit card? Do they use cash? Do they use cash and wait for the correct change? Are they able to slide their debit card through the machine and enter their PIN?

What stores do they go to? This gives us insight into their interests. Do they make rash decisions about what they are going to buy or do they really look at prices?

What else do they do while they are at the mall? Do they go to a restaurant? How do they order? Are they using the pictures? Are they able to read? All of these are important things that we can observe just by our trip to the mall with an individual.

We also want to understand nonwork needs of the job seeker. This includes everything else that is important to the job seeker that affects work. Transportation is a huge issue. How is the individual going to get to and from work? Because how they get there will affect when they are available to work. If they are using specialized transportation, we have to consider

when is that available to them. Are there certain hours that it is not available? So overnights are not an option or evenings or weekends are not an option.

How about budgeting? Do they need help with money management? Do they need help from a benefits counselor if they are receiving disability benefits or other state or federal benefits?

What about recreation and social activities? This is a huge area of life that we don't want to forget about. We don't want to leave out in the planning process. Are there individuals who attend church every Sunday or every Wednesday? That's important to them and we want to make sure that they can still do that.

Are there medical appointments or regular counselor visits that we need to attend to so that the employer knows that ahead of time and we've negotiated that in the employment process.

We also utilize an informational interview. This is a great way for both the job seeker and Employment Specialist to learn about businesses and the tasks being performed in those businesses.

So many individuals with disabilities that we work with have no idea about the vast number of businesses in their community and what is done in those walls.

And so informational interviews are a great way to see what's going on in a business and also to learn more about those businesses and what the work culture is like within the business.

Job shadows and business tours also helps job seekers and Employment Specialists get a visualization of tasks that are being performed in that environment. Again, what the culture is like within a business.

My best friend came down this weekend and she got a new job. She was excited to tell me that when she had gone on her interview and to learn more about the company, that they had a whole wall of coffee machines and bowls full of M & Ms. This was a huge perk to her. It was one of the reasons she chose that job, because she loves coffee. And who doesn't love chocolate?

Once you've completed the discovery activities, you should be able to get a good idea of who your job seeker is and that will allow you to build a vocational profile of the individual.

It brings together everything that you've learned about the individual during the discovery process and really guides the businesses that you'll look at for job development.

You can think of it as a story, if you will, a story of who the job seeker is, focusing mainly on the positives. Really only on the positives. It is not a judgmental, it is not a

biased document. It is a straight facts. This is who the person is and this is what we observed.

It shows what the individual's skills, abilities, and interests are and what their features of employment need to be. And this also includes an employment planning meeting where the individual can invite all of their friends and family that are important to them to talk about what the plan is moving forward. And it allows us to take some time to brainstorm ideas of businesses and job tasks that would be a good match for the individual.

What I've seen in my career is that traditional resumes don't always portray the skills and abilities of the individuals that we serve. And the job seekers that we represent.

So customized employment utilizes a portfolio or visual resume for individuals that really do highlight their skills, abilities, and interests. We can use them to share with business managers and business owners when we meet with those individuals to give a better and a more accurate picture of the individual that we are working with.

We like to use Power Points. In those Power Points, use videos or a combination of videos and pictures. We've used movie and other apps before to kind of highlight and show a short movie about the individual.

And using as many photos about not only the individual and what they have experience doing, what they did during that discovery process, but also what their interests and some of their maybe high school activities that they've done to build a nice well-rounded picture of the individual.

So when we are looking at job development and customized employment, we are not looking at open positions but rather strategically targeting businesses in our community that match what we determined through the discovery process for the individual that we are working with. We are utilizing both the job seekers' network as well as our own network as an Employment Specialist, but also utilizing the family or friends or support folks that are important to the individual. We are using their network. The bigger the network, the better.

We are approaching businesses with the intent to learn more about them. Often as rehab professionals we go into businesses and we just talk and talk and talk and talk and never ask any questions of the business. So it is really important that we learn how to shut our mouths a little bit more and listen a little bit more. So ask open-ended questions of the business and let them talk. I promise, they will love to talk about their business and what they do.

And not have us worry so much about sharing so much, especially in those first meetings. We want to give them time

for us to learn about them and then we can share about what we do.

Another approach that we use is working interviews. We use these a lot at VCU. They have been very successful. And this is an opportunity for the individual to go into the business at a preset time for a preset amount of time. So really, no more than an hour or two, to show the business owner or manager how that individual is able to do the job or, excuse me, the tasks that you have negotiated for that individual to try.

Often times individuals don't really interview as well as maybe their colleagues. So this would give the individual a time to show what they can do versus using verbal skills to do that.

Then after that, we would be negotiating positions using an employment proposal that would lay out exactly what the tasks would be, what types of support the individual would need, what the role of the Employment Specialist would be, what hours the individual would work, a proposed pay rate for the individual.

The last step of customized employment would be where the Employment Specialist would actually work with the new employee and the employer at the job site providing on site training, identifying any accommodations or supports that the individual needs, whether those are physical supports, whether they are compensatory strategies, but also looking at natural supports there in the business as well as community supports.

So now that we've given you a little overview of customized employment, we want to share about some of the research that we are doing at VCU. Very little research has been done regarding customized employment in this model. So we were fortunate enough to be awarded a Disability and Rehabilitation Research Projects on customized employment on individuals with disabilities. We are testing the effectiveness of customized employment as an intervention to facilitate employment for youth with disabilities. This project is funded through the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research and we are working with young adults with developmental disabilities who are ages 18 to 24. It is a partnership with TransCen and we are comparing employment outcomes as individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism who receive customized employment versus those who receive services as usual.

At this point we are going to hear from some of those Employment Specialists and research staff, both from VCU and TransCen, regarding the work that has been done thus far in the project.

>> MARY ANN BECKMAN: Hi, I'm Mary Ann Beckman, Study Coordinator for TransCen. I'm with customized employment with VCU.

>> JENNY LICHTTE: I'm Jenny Lichte, Employment Specialist for VCU RTC.

>> KAITLIN JONES: I'm Kaitlin Jones. I work for VCU RTC, and I'm an Employment Specialist.

>> MARY ANN BECKMAN: We are here today to have a panel discussion on customized employment and this project. Why don't we start out with the discovery process. Kaitlin and Jenny, visiting the home of a person is recommended as the first step in the discovery process. What have you learned by going into a person's home that you might not have noticed if you skip that step?

Kaitlin, would you like to go first?

>> KAITLIN JONES: Yes. By going to my job seeker's home, Jane, I was able to see her with her family members, observe her in a comfortable setting and this allowed me to see how she appropriately communicates with her family members. That helps me communicate with her more effectively.

>> JENNY LICHTTE: I would agree that being in a job seeker's environment is important. They come in the much more informal way. They are not dressed to impress. They are comfortable. One of my job seeker's came out with his John Deere hat camouflage sweatshirt, and Carhartt pants, and it was easy to see what his interests may be.

>> MARY ANN BECKMAN: Thank you. Kaitlin, can you tell about a discovery activity that helped you to get to know one of your job seekers?

>> KAITLIN JONES: A discovery activity that I got to know my job seeker Robert was really important because I had to build up a lot of trust and rapport with him. So we started with a discovery activity at the science museum. He is a physics major at VCU. And I really wanted to learn more about what type of science he was interested in. This discovery activity allowed me to find out more about that.

And then just as we got more comfortable and he trusted me more I was able to go to his, one of his science classes. I learned that he was very outspoken and answered a lot of questions. So I was able to learn these things through discovery.

>> MARY ANN BECKMAN: Okay. Jenny, can you think of an example?

>> JENNY LICHTTE: Sure. I have a participant who loves to ride her bike. So one of the discovery activities was going for a bike ride around her neighborhood and to just see the way that

she was able to navigate herself with safety rules, other cars on the road.

She had a very huge level of independence when she was on her bike. She didn't need a lot of other supports. It was her own little world. That was good for me to see these are the things she is able to do and has a level of independence when she is involved in something she enjoys.

>> MARY ANN BECKMAN: Okay, thank you. So as you are going through your discovery, why do you think it is important then to identify employment themes for a job seeker?

>> KAITLIN JONES: I think it's very important because it's more individual-specific to the job seeker. It allows the Employment Specialist to have more of a direct path when looking at different businesses. It is going off the interests and strengths and abilities of the job seeker and not just a broad bucket of information.

>> JENNY LICHTER: Right. You're kind of looking at what the job seeker wants instead of what an employer may want. We are able to pick a general category that has the strengths and the interests of the job seeker, and we can move on from there in terms of where we will conduct our informational interviews.

>> MARY ANN BECKMAN: Jenny, would you like to go first and give us an example of how you identified an employer's needs for a specific job seeker?

>> JENNY LICHTER: Sure. I think that goes back to when we go into an employer doing a lot more listening than talking, asking of questions that are open-ended. And looking around the environment to see what are those jobs that seem to be unattended to, because there are bigger tasks to be completed in their place of work.

>> KAITLIN JONES: A specific example that I have was observing in a grocery store. I was kind of observing and I noticed that they had messy and unorganized aisles. One of my job seekers had experience with this. Which was called facing, which is organizing the different boxes and making sure they were put in place and there weren't boxes on the floor.

So I scheduled an informational interview which is important in this process. I had a conversation with the manager of the grocery store that I observed. And customized this employment for the job seeker.

>> JENNY LICHTER: Me too, in a place of employment it was an engine shop and many tractors were on display to be sold and covered with dust and dirt and seeing that they wanted to present their machines in a good way, I asked who does the cleaning of these machines? And how do you keep up on that? He commented that we used to keep them very clean but we don't have

someone who does that anymore. So it's a matter of questioning and listening.

>> MARY ANN BECKMAN: How do you customize employment to an employer?

>> JENNY LICHTTE: It is important to let the employer know that by customizing the position, they can customize the, you can take the strengths and interests of the job seekers and they can look at what they need to do to operate in an efficient way and they can customize that position for that job seeker.

>> KAITLIN JONES: I agree with Jenny.

>> MARY ANN BECKMAN: So why? Why would an employer want to customize a job for a person with a disability?

>> JENNY LICHTTE: I think.

>> KAITLIN JONES: I think they one want to customize the position for a person because maybe it frees up an employee that they are taking over some tasks that aren't part of their job duties. Maybe not paying that coworker over time or usually with a person with a disability in the community, it you bumps up or improves the employees' morale.

>> JENNY LICHTTE: I think it improves the culture of the whole company when you have someone who is working there with a disability. They are seen as productive members of that business and that they can do just as much good as all of the other employees in that business.

>> MARY ANN BECKMAN: Okay. Can you share with us, what do you think the benefits of customized employment are for the job seeker? For that individual with a disability?

>> KAITLIN JONES: I think there's a lot of benefits. It gives them a sense of community, a sense of purpose. It can boost their confidence by going into work. They gain friendships, relationships.

>> JENNY LICHTTE: I agree. I think the fact that it's customized, it again is to the strengths and interests of that job seeker. They go into a job feeling comfortable and confident in what they are doing. They know they can perform this task which then translates into them being wanted at that place of employment. People are glad that they are there. It creates that community and the friendships that Kaitlin is talking about.

>> MARY ANN BECKMAN: Okay. Next we'll move into each of you have a chance to go to a case study with very specific examples on what we just talked about. So thank you.

>> KAITLIN JONES: Thank you.

So Sarah, I'm her Employment Specialist. I have been working with Sarah since January 2018. She is 21 years old.

So let's start with discovery. Discovery was really important with Sarah. My first visit with her was at her home.

I remember her opening the door with a bright smile. She immediately grabbed my jacket, hung it up, great personality. I remember thinking, wow, she has a great personality.

I sat on the couch with her mom and we just had a conversation. We all had a conversation. Sarah involved as well. I got to know that she really likes spending time with her dog. She loves to dance and sing. She went to school at Norfolk Academy and had a lot of work experiences, which included being involved in a vet tech. She worked at a gym. She was currently involved in an internship at hospitality food services.

And the next thing we did was we wanted to get to know each other a little bit more, so we went into our discovery activities.

With our discovery activity, the very first thing we did, we went to a smoothie shop. My first visit with Sarah, her mom told me that was her absolute favorite thing. If we wanted to get to know each other a little bit more and have her tell me a little bit more about herself, was to go to a smoothie shop and sit with her, play games.

We observed them getting some of the smoothies put together and I really got to know Sarah a little bit more. When we were at the smoothie shop, she invited me to her internship. Her internship was at Performance Food Group where she was working with a coworker that helped Sarah kind of stay on her tasks. And she started this internship with her classmates, but the manager said that she really stood out to -- she stood out out of all of her classmates because of her personality and her work ethic.

So exploring this theme, I went and observed her there. I observed that Sarah was very comfortable going through the first floor of Performance Food Group, had very, was very comfortable with some of the coworkers she worked with and knew what she was doing throughout her whole shift. I saw her already getting independent.

So some of Sarah's job duties were, she was stocking the cafe and the break room with table ware, plates and cups and drinks, helping the head chef. She was delivering mail to each of the break rooms. And she was stamping the out going mail.

She delivered Fed Ex that was coming in to Performance Food Group to all the different employees. And she also at the end of her shift, she would go and help the receptionist at the front desk answering phone calls and just kind of saying "hi" to all the employees that were coming in.

So the next step for me was after observing her for about two weeks, I approached management and we started with a job negotiation. So the management was very interested in Sarah

having an Employment Specialist with her instead of one of the employees interrupting his day and job duties to be with Sarah and make sure she is staying on task doing the tasks appropriately and effectively.

So this went into Sarah getting a permanent job at Performance Food Group. She works every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday. She makes \$12 an hour and with me doing job site training with her right now, she already has become very independent. She learned a lot of new tasks since the beginning of me watching her in her observation. And she as an Employment Specialist for her, I laid out a job duty schedule which has all of her tasks laid out that she can refer back to and check off that she's completed it. And as she's getting more independent, I've slowly faded out from her. So first we started with fading out just while I was on the job site and she was doing it by herself. She would check in with me after each task. Then we've gone, I come in later into Performance Food Group. She would start off her shift by herself.

Now we've gotten to the point where I only come in a few hours a week with Sarah. She has been very successful, very independent. The manager is really happy with her performance. And soon it will only be me coming in sporadically, checking up on Sarah at Performance Food Group. She's doing a great job.

>> JENNY LICHTER: So I have had the pleasure of working with Dan in my case study. Dan loves small engines. The dirtier he can be, the better. That was my first indication that this was a great place to look for Dan.

When I first met him, he came to the kitchen table in his family home dressed in his Carhartt pants with his camouflage sweatshirt and John Deere hat. We sat around the kitchen table spending some time talking about things he enjoyed. One of the things he was most proud to talk about was his side job of tree cutting where he showed a pile of wood from ground to roof of a garage that he had stacked himself. And he also took us to show his truck and tractor. And was very proud that he knew how to change the oil on those machines and was tinkering with their engine.

The first thing we decided to do was do a job shadow. So we knew that he was interested in small engines. We went to a couple local car dealerships. But because they are such large corporations, they ran into a lot of red tape issues. So even though the store level people were very excited to have Dan come and do a work trial, the corporate offices, things got hung up. We weren't able to follow through with that.

And having gotten to know the family through discovery and doing things with Dan, mom made us a suggestion. She said there's this great little equipment shop down the road. Dan

takes the tractor there when it is broken. He takes the snow blower there when it is broken and I think they even know him by name.

So we set up a work -- sorry, an interview, informational interview and job shadow with the equipment store.

So when we went to the equipment store, we could see that there were only a handful of employees. It was a family-owned business. The owner, he and his wife owned the store. They had a showroom full of red and green tractors, John Deere, of course. They were covered with inches of dust. And after asking questions about how do you keep your showroom clean for when people are coming in to purchase your tractors, the owner said well, my elderly father-in-law used to come in and clean them, but he just can't get in here anymore.

We were able to say, well, Dan is your guy. If he can come to work and leave with dirt on his knees and grease under his fingernails, he's going to do a great job. They were excited about the option of a work trial. Dan and I went in. Within an hour's time he had cleaned ten tractors, spotless, shining and red and they wanted to hire him on the spot.

From there we did a job proposal than and began our negotiations. Dan now works there three days a week for a total of 11 hours. He's getting paid eight dollars an hour. He truly is independent when he works there.

On his latest evaluation which was a three-month evaluation he had glowing reviews from his coworkers and the owner saying, "We absolutely love having Dan work here."

It is a truly customized position where he is supported by his colleagues and cough workers and we provide spot checks to be sure that things are going accordingly.

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: Thanks, everyone for joining us today. I want to especially thank Mary Ann and Jenny and Kaitlin for sharing their experiences and sharing their stories about Dan and Sarah. It was great to hear that.

On our website you can find more information about our project as well as other trainings, fact sheets, things like that. So I encourage you to visit our website.

And finally, our web board is available. So if you have any questions for any of us that you would like more information about a specific topic or have individuals that you are working with that maybe you've reached a barrier that you don't know how to tackle, please feel free to reach out to us and ask us any of those questions. We will be happy to help.

Have a great day and we'll talk to you soon.

(Pause.)

>> TERRY DONOVAN: Thanks, Jennifer. I will now turn it over to Heidi Decker-Maurer, who will facilitate the question

and answer period of time. I will -- Jennifer, unfortunately, wherever she is broadcasting from, she lost her Internet. So she is on the phone. So Heidi, you'll need to repeat questions for Jennifer. She isn't able to see them at the moment.

So I will turn it over to you. Thanks very much.

(Pause.)

>> TERRY DONOVAN: Sorry, Heidi. We are not hearing you, or I'm not hearing you. Perhaps volume? Hmm, still not.

(Pause.)

>> TERRY DONOVAN: Okay.

Not hearing you. Tell you what, where is the ... we aren't seeing any specific questions at the moment. Oh, okay.

Well, while Heidi is sorting that out, Jennifer, are you on the call?

Oh, boy.

Are we hearing ... hmm.

A number ever technological glitches here. We may have -- let me see.

She said she's on. Heidi? Go ahead.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: All right!

>> TERRY DONOVAN: Okay, I'm hearing you. Jennifer? Can you ... oh, you know what? I've got to, give me a minute here. I have to find Jennifer on the participant list. Oh, boy.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Technology, you can't live with it, can't live without it.

What we can do in the meantime, Jennifer, thank you so much

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>> TERRY DONOVAN: Jennifer, are you there?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: I'm here. Can you hear me yet?

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: That's good.

>> TERRY DONOVAN: Thank you.

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: Hello, technology!

>> TERRY DONOVAN: Heidi, back to you.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Can fast particular. First of all, Jennifer, I want to thank you so much for the excellent presentation. It was wonderful to see 33 folks in the field who had specific examples of things that they tried and helping their consumers get jobs that really suited them very well.

It sounds like those techniques were working very well. Thank you so much for a wonderful presentation and a great idea, including practitioners in the presentation. So thanks for that.

I'm looking over here at the questions we have a few of them now. Thank you, everybody, for sending your questions in and for joining us especially.

The first question that has been presented here is: How do you all deal with really difficult clients who have verbal

impairments and does not communicate through sign language but only sounds?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: I'm sorry, could you repeat that?

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Sure can. How do you deal with clients who have verbal impairments and do not communicate through sign language?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: That's an interesting question. We were just talking about an individual that we are working with right now who does not use sign language and has very limited verbal skills.

So we are looking at some different assistive technology devices but also getting some very low tech items put into place related to like small pocket cards and different ways to just begin that communication process. Of course, his mom will say: Well, I know what he wants, you know. But we haven't spent the last 20 years with him and we are not his mama. So mamas always know, but we don't have that innate ability to understand him.

So we are starting with some pretty basic low tech, just paper photos of different things that he can select by pointing to it. And then also looking at some higher tech devices as well, including apps that he can put on his phone.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: That sounds like a very reasonable way to help an individual get their -- communicate and get their needs across. That's a great answer. Thank you, Jen.

Looking at our next question, the person -- Lynn, thank you for the question. About how long do you spend on the discovery phase? Is Lynn's question.

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: Another great question. We were talking about that this morning. The work that we are doing with the customized employment research really is looking at how long does it take to complete discovery because there are definitely different schools of thought out there and different providers who have their opinions and beliefs as to how long it could take. Anywhere from 20, 30 hours. Nobody has researched that before.

So that is one of the things that we are researching. We don't have any data on that just yet, but we are looking at it and we should have more information about that soon.

What we were talking about this morning in our meeting was those individuals who come to us who have very few experiences, maybe a poverty of vocational experiences or really life experiences in general. They are, of course, going to take more time. Many of the individuals that I have met with through this project have come, they may be in school or out of school and have, of course, never had a job; have not had any community-based training within their school. They are kept in the school building, or even doing any work say on the grounds of the

campus of the school. They are just in their classrooms and kind of going along with their daily activities.

Don't have a lot of social interactions outside of school. So they have very limited knowledge of their interest areas. So we are finding that those individuals are taking longer than the individuals who have at least had some work experiences, even if those are community-based experiences through their schools where they weren't paid.

But that's kind of common sense, I think.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Sure, that makes sense. I think sometimes if folks are in school, there are a lot of students and with their counselors, sometimes the counselors can think outside the box and come up with really good solutions, as your folks did the video. There was a lot of creativity there and a lot of finding things that people were interested in and also finding the right kind of match. So I think those were excellent examples.

Speaking of, Norma has a question: Is there an example of the job duties that were made by job specialists that were tailored to them? With their examples, we had the consumer who liked working with tractors and we had the consumer who liked working in that office environment. So I'm not sure, maybe in addition to those two examples, do you have any more that you can think of off the top of my head that were made by Employment Specialists?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: Can you hear me? I just switched over. Our Internet came back.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Oh, good. Fantastic. Sure can.

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: So some of the, an example that comes to mind is we had an individual come to us who was very interested in clerical duties. And she had had some experiences in school, entering data, processing kind of papers, if you will, making deliveries.

So she was also interested in working in a professional setting. So we contacted a legal office that we used our social capital for and just made some great connections there. She is working processing closed cases. So she goes through and pulls out all of the material that needs to be pulled out and scanned. Then she takes the other materials and puts them into kind of a shredding file for somebody else to process. And is able to sort all of that material and put them in certain files based on the information that the attorney's office has given her.

So she closes files or closes cases for them. She does that several days a week.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Very good. That's very interesting.

We have a number of questions left. As I look at the questions, we are going to make sure and answer the questions that are going to have the most application across the most number of our attendees. So if questions are really specific, we are keeping note of them and we will have Jennifer answer them perhaps offline, if we don't have time for it by the end of our session today.

The next question, Lisa has posted: When calling a company to set up an informational interview, who is the best person to ask to meet with? It is very difficult to talk to HR departments.

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: I would agree, it is difficult to talk to HR departments.

I like to not go into a company cold. So I would use every resource available to find a name of somebody. I like to look for a department manager or a hiring manager or someone who is actually overseeing the real work that is being done versus going in through the HR department, where they are processing requests for positions and may not know what the actual day-to-day activities are. I'm looking for a direct manager to meet with. I'm scouring my contacts, the individual that I'm serving, the family's contacts, the individual's contacts. All of the employees in the office, their contacts. I'm not opposed to stalking folks on the Internet and figuring out who works at this business, who do I know, who do they know.

If it is, for example, an attorney's office and I know an attorney, I'm going to reach out to that attorney to see who they know in that particular office that they can connect me with.

So trying to turn that into a warm contact is critical, in my opinion and in my experience.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: That seems to be a theme that has gone across many of our webinars, the fact that really the professional network needs to be highly developed and creating those relationships with employers, it sometimes will take a lot of time at the front end but then it pays off later and can make things much easier later if you know someone who knows someone.

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: Absolutely.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: That seems to follow along the lines of most of our other webinars where we talk about working with employers.

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: And I'm someone who likes to talk to a lot of people. So I take every opportunity in every setting to talk about what I do and what they do, because you never know. It might work out for somebody that we are working with in the long run.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Absolutely. That's fantastic.

Our next question is from Rebecca. She asks: In making the job proposal, who does that piece? Is it the job developer or the VR counselor?

Basically asking a little bit, how does that process happen?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: For us, it is the Employment Specialist or the job developer that does that. They are one and the same here at VCU. We do not separate out to one person does job developing and one person does job site training. We start with the individual at the beginning and take them all the way through to follow-along.

Our Employment Specialists create those employment proposals based on the information that they have gathered from typically multiple meetings with the business.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: That makes a lot of sense. Thank you for that question.

Moving on to the next question, Lynn asks: What kind of job tenure are you seeing from your participants?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: This project specifically is fairly young in the process. So we are seeing some good numbers with retention. However, we have data from previous work-related to customized employment that has shown that when the jobs are truly customized and you are meeting the needs of both the job seeker and the business, and I think that's really important. We have to meet the needs of both -- that retention is far better than when you are looking at basically placing somebody into an open position merely because it is an open position and they are looking for a job.

So we feel that the match and making that match as best we can in the beginning really leads to great success in the end. And individuals stay employed far longer. I don't have any data in front of me. Sorry, I can get that for you if I need to.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: That's a great answer. I think that really folks have to look at it on a case-by-case basis. And make sure that folks are getting into a position where they want to stay. When you are able to customize a job like that, the counselors see a need and they help fulfill that need for an employer with the employee's talent.

Sometimes with any kind of job it can seem like there's make work. If it is a specific job tailored to that person's interest, it makes sense that folks would be, would stay in their employment longer.

Our next question is from Meghan. How do you deal with helicopter parents who take over the meetings or intakes? Are you unable to even really get to talk to your consumer? That has kind of been an up and coming issue here at the university Wisconsin staff with BRI, with university students, it seems to be an issue too with them.

Do you have any advice for folks?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: Well, I think building rapport with parents. I think parents are -- I'm a parent. I know that I'm anxious about my son's room looming graduation and what is going to happen to them. Add on disability or disabilities, plural, that just really ratchets up a parent's concerns, and rightly so.

So if we can think about parents and where they are coming from and understand that and try to address, really find out what their worries are and help answer those questions, I think it's helpful. Allowing, just allowing them to talk. Sometimes parents just need to vent and talk their frustrations through. And I have a parent who we have been working with and she is just frustrated. Sometimes you need to talk to her. You know you are going to need some more time for that phone call. Once she gets through her own frustrations, everything from her own job to worries about her daughter, when she gets through that, then she is really ready to have a conversation and listen to what you say.

If you don't let her have that time, you are going to meet a lot of resistance and potentially some anger.

So -- and I have been able to say, you know, I get it. I have kids. I understand where you're coming from. So adding that in has helped with me. Not everybody has kids, so that can be difficult.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Right. But it has been my experience in a lot of different situations that sometimes people just need to know that someone is listening to them. And acknowledging what their concerns are.

So I think that's a great piece of advice.

Let's see here. Nancy asks: In your experience, how do employers react to the visual resumes?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: We had great success with those. We have also had great success with what we call a working interview where instead of the individual doing a traditional sit down across the desk from the hiring manager and trying to answer questions that they might not be able to answer as well as someone else, where we actually say: Can they come in and try out the job? Let us show you their skills.

We might start off with that visual resume and say look, here is some of the tasks that John is really good at. We put together this resume for you. Let me just show it. And pull it up on my laptop or my phone or iPad, whatever the case may be. And show it to the employer.

Or, you know, then following that up with the working interview and letting them see the individual do the tasks for 30, 45 minutes. And that helps them, the business to sometimes

ease their concerns of what does this really look like? This customized employment job coach situation.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: That certainly makes sense, being able to see for yourself whether the person fits in with those job duties.

I've got a question from cargo ton: Do the job seekers determine themselves how many hours they can work? Is there some input from the employer and or Employment Specialist?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: Well, we definitely start with the job seeker and say how many hours are you looking to work? Do you want to work part-time? Full-time? Certain days of the week? That's what guides us.

Once we begin working with businesses, then we have to look at what their needs are. So if John wants to work Monday, Wednesdays, Fridays and every other Saturday but the business needs them Monday, Tuesday, Friday, and every other Saturday, that's when the Employment Specialist puts on their skills and says I understand that you want these particular days off, but this is where the business needs you or whatever the case may be. But also knowing what their non-negotiables are going into the process is important. So if Wednesday nights are out because that is when they always go to youth group at their church, or Sundays are always out, then we are absolutely respectful of those non-negotiables.

A lot of times people will say, well, I only want to work these days, but when push comes to shove and they really like the position, they are like: Oh, okay, that's fine.

(Chuckles.)

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Sure. That makes sense.

We have a question from Shannon. The question is: What is the average time frame from beginning to end of the customized employment process?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: That is part of what we are looking at at our research as well. We don't have any data just yet that shows how long that process is. It really is individualized to the job seeker. Their skill set, their experiences, and so we don't have any of that information just yet.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Would you mind answering perhaps for one of the two examples, the folks that were featured around how long it may have taken for one or two, one or both of those folks to get through the process?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: I do not know -- I know that the process was pretty quick for the young man who was working with the tractor situation and the Carhartt jeans and all that kind of stuff. I know it was quick. I don't remember how long.

Quite honestly, when Kaitlin was talking, that's when my Internet went out.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Oh, no!

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: So I don't even know who she was talking about at this point. So I apologize.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: That's quite all right. Sometimes technology just helps us hone our problem solving skills, doesn't it?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: Yes.

(Laughter.)

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: We have a little bit more specific questions. Regina asks: Is customized employment similar to IPS for Michigan? Or from that model but with clients who have intellectual disabilities?

If I didn't get that right, Regina, please feel free to type in the Q&A to clarify. But the question is: Is customized employment similar to IPS?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: I will be honest, I have heard of IPS. I am not familiar enough with it to be able to answer that question. And really looking at what that model is, that is not a model that we have here at the center that we have practiced.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Okay. I was just looking to see if I could find any information on Michigan's website. And I'm not sure, I wouldn't be able to answer this question from the information I found quickly on the website. Regina, if it's all right with you I'll record your question and have Jennifer look into it to see if there are similarities.

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: Sure.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: For one of our other questions, for the folks who were presented in the examples, the attendee asks why regular VR services were insufficient, why did those folks need customized employment?

Did they have special challenges or barriers that they had that would make them more, a better candidate for customized employment rather than just regular VR services?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: The individuals that were featured were individuals who self selected to become part of our research study. And they were offered the opportunity to be part of the research and they chose to be a part of the research. So that was really more the case rather than where VR chose a service for them.

Now in Virginia we have customized employment as a service option for individuals who are connected to our state VR. So if the DR counselor speaks to the family and they feel that based on their skills that they have and their abilities and their life experiences, that customized employment would be a better

match, then they can refer them to us separately for customized employment.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Super. Thank you for asking that.

Let's see. Johnny has a concern. I'm sure this is shared by lots of parents and other folks. At the phase where the participant is more independent, what mechanisms are in place to ensure the safety of participants? So that they are safe and not being taken advantage of? I don't know in the case of a study how that would work or just in general how that would work.

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: I am assuming that this is a question just in general. Parents concerned about my child is getting ready to go out into the community and be at a job site. I have worked in a program where we were based out of a hospital and parents were often concerned with just dropping their children off at the hospital and, you know, us not find can them or losing them at some point along the way.

You know, so it really is individualized to that client and their work setting. So we typically, when we find someone a job, no matter what the situation is, we start with them at the first day meeting them at the door. Or in the parking lot, wherever we've kind of set up as our place to meet. And walking through them through the whole process of getting into the building, how to navigate from the entrance to their work station.

At the end of the day, that whole process as well. As well as throughout the day making sure that they know how to navigate the site, if it's a large building. Making sure that they have points of contact and really building in natural supports along the way and communicating.

I am big on communication. Everybody that works for me hears me talk about it. If you don't tell families what is going on, they are going to be nervous.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Sure.

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: We need to be as communicative as possible.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Uh-huh. And I think with Johnny's concern, possibly -- I'm not sure -- it makes sense to me that since your counselors are making such, going to the extent to make such good relationships with the employers that it is somebody that the counselor trusts, would be able to handle and not misuse the opportunities they have to hire folks who have disables. I think that probably there's a lot of trust involved on all ends.

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: We do trainings for coworkers and the supervisors as welcoming into this, into the employment situation. In fact, we just had someone get hired on at a

business and it sets kind of back off of a road that is heavily kind of industrial in nature and the new employer is taking USER, which is like Lyft, to and from her job site. We communicated with mom to say: Have you driven back there? It's set back off and it's kind of dark when she gets off and there are not many people. If you're all good, the employees seem fine with it, but we want to make sure everybody is on the same page.

As it turned out, the employer contacted my job coach yesterday afternoon and said, you know, we are not comfortable with this. She hadn't even talked to him about it. She said, the new employee is having to stay here until 6. There's not many of us around. We want to make sure she's safe. So they are ending her day at 5:30 just to make sure she's safe.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Sure. That's fantastic.

I do see that a few folks have raised their hands in our chat. If you have questions that we can't answer in the Q&A, if you are on the phone and unable to type them in the question and answer box here in our Zoom platform, we are going to have folks go ahead and send those questions in via email. We will have some information about email and you'll receive an email tomorrow after the webinar, giving you directions on how to get your continuing education credits.

So if you have a question and we can't get to it today through the phone, it would be great if you can email them to us and we'll forward them to Jennifer and make sure you get an answer.

I have a few other questions here in the Q&A box. Seth asks, are all of these individuals generally those receiving supported employment related funds under a Medicaid waiver? Or just some of them?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: The individuals that were highlighted in this particular situation were not receiving supported employment through Medicaid waiver. They were receiving the customized employment through the research grant.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Okay.

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: We in general at the research and training center here when we have individuals who are referred, like I was talking about for customized employment, the vast majority of them are coming to us through state VR. We do have a few folks that will maybe transition over to Medicaid waiver services, but for the most part they are coming to us from VR versus Medicaid waiver.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: The next question is pretty specific. Beth asks, I'm a VR transition counselor at NYS commission for the blind. In hearing your discussion, it almost sounds like CE in Virginia is a supported employment service and

not a competitive employment service. Does this make sense? We currently have customized employment as an option under our competitive employment service.

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: It is a competent employment service. I don't know how it is worded up there, but we do not provide any type of employment service that is not competitive.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Okay.

Well, that is all the questions that I have right now from our attendees. I think that it was really great for folks to have that, like I said before, that experience of hearing from the counselors themselves and getting a little bit more of the detail into those questions and finding out about the consumers' interests ahead of time. I think that's probably really key for the counselors, to make sure that someone is getting a customized experience and getting into a position that is going to work both for the employer and for the consumer.

It's always interesting to me when you are working with employers; you definitely have to show them "what's in it for me".

Looking at their environment at a workplace and seeing a need that could be filled by someone, one of your consumers who has an interest in that sort of thing, it just seems like a really great fit to make sure that you are finding that need. Nobody likes make work. So it sounds like it is a very good system for making sure that employers are getting what they need and that your consumers are getting what they need too.

How long has the study been going on, Jennifer?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: We are about two and a half years in. Of course, part of that first year is getting approvals and things like that. So we are about two years of actually working with individuals.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Okay. What was your -- how did you go about recruiting folks for the project?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: For the actual job seekers?

We network with our state vocational rehab counselors, all of the local school systems as well as parent groups like our autism association, Down's syndrome association, things like that.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Okay. You justice statewide through these different organizations and through your network?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: It is only here in the Richmond Metro area.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Okay.

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: We did have the group up north that we were working with, but that has since ended. Now we are just here in the Richmond Metro area. It is not even statewide.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: If you don't mind my asking, how many participants were you able to recruit?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: Right now we are at 27 -- excuse me. I have to double my numbers. Close to 60.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Okay.

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: Half of those individuals are randomized into a control group and the other half are randomized into the customized employment group.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: And how long is the study projected to last?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: It is a five-year study. So we have two-ish more years.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: It is always interesting with those studies. The "ish" is sometimes the part that gets you over the hump and helps you get all the reporting done that you need to done once you've come to your conclusions. That's interesting.

Terry, I thought I saw that your microphone going on. Was there something that you wanted to chip? Or pitch in?

>> TERRY DONOVAN: No, just getting ready for the transition. Are we feeling done with Q&A?

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: I'm just going to throw out the ask one more time. If anybody has any questions, now is the time. Otherwise we'll turn it over to Terry and Jen in a few moments.

But Jen, is there anything else you would like to add about the study that you found helpful or our audience members might like to know about?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: I think just staying a breast of our website. We have webcasts, we have web courses, fact sheets, all of that information on our website. So I would encourage folks to go there.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Jen, can I type that Web site into the chat box? Jennifer?

>> JENNIFER McDONOUGH: I can do that.

>> HEIDI DECKER-MAURER: Oh, okay!

Either way is fine with me.

Well, I think that we are going to go ahead and thank general furnish for all of her time and answering all of our questions and bringing us such a rich webinar experience with all the folks, the counselors who were able to share their personal experiences with us.

If anybody does have any questions, you can go ahead and send them to us. You will be receiving an email tomorrow with instructions forgetting your CRCs. You can also use that email to ask any questions that you may think of later.

With that, Terry, I think I'll turn it over to you.

>> TERRY DONOVAN: Thanks, Heidi. A quick hand off to Jennifer Gundlach Klatt, who will say a little bit more about

the CRCs that Heidi was talking about, as well as where you can find both this recording, when this would be available as well as other recordings of all of our previous webinars. Jen? When Jen is done we will pretty much be done unless somebody has a question that leaps to mind in the next few minutes.

>> JENNIFER GUNDLACH KLATT: Thanks, Terry. I hope you enjoyed today's webcast. If you are in need of CRCs, the link is in the chat, this can be found within our webcast at project E3.com. You will also receive an email tomorrow with these instructions.

All of our webcasts are archived and eligible for one CRC. These can also be found on our webcast page. If you have any questions about CRCs, please direct those to project E3TC@goodmail.com. A reminder, next week's webcast will be on Thursday, February 6, at 11:00 a.m. Central and is entitled Instructional Strategies for Acquisition and Maintenance of Customized Job Tasks. This will be presented by Tim Riesen.

Thanks for joining today.

>> TERRY DONOVAN: Great. Thanks, Jennifer. Let's see. I think that's it. Thanks, everybody. Again if you have any questions, we keep saying that, any follow up occurs to you, send us a note from all the emails you receive from us.

Today's webinar, as I said earlier, in case you have friends who are interested you say it was a good webinar, they also have a free CRC credit. It takes us anywhere from one to two weeks to get the recordings posted. As I noted we want to assure that all of our captioning lines up with all of our presentation materials, that type of thing, and just workload.

Don't expect to see it posted tomorrow. It will be a while. But for those of you who watched and get the email, answer the evaluation, give us your name and email at the end of the evaluation form if you would like a CRC credit. That as well can take a week on two weeks, given the volume that we have on folks asking CRC credits.

With that we will end the meeting. Thanks, everybody, for joining us today. As Jen noted we will be the same place, same time, same station next week for another tremendous webinar in our series.

Thanks, everybody, and have a wonderful day wherever you are.

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