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Abstract

This article was written by an MA student who did some research at Family Advocacy. It describes the concept of supported employment and several models. It also covers some of the societal aspects which influence supported employment. **Keyword: Employment**

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES: MODELS, BENEFITS AND IMPEDIMENTS.

Models of supported employment¹ for people with disabilities emerged in the late 1970's. These programs offered employment to individuals who were traditionally thought to be unemployable in the competitive labour market, particularly individuals with chronic psychiatric illnesses and those with intellectual disabilities. These individuals tend to not benefit from traditional time-limited vocational rehabilitation services (Noble and Conley, 1987).

Research indicates that most people with disabilities are unemployed but, at the same time, want to work. For example, in the United States, approximately 87% of all working age individuals with intellectual disabilities are unemployed (Kiernan and Stark, 1989). Furthermore, a survey in 1986 (cited in Piuma and Zivolich, 1992) revealed that 65% of unemployed individuals with disabilities identified a strong preference for employment.

What is supported employment?

Supported employment consists of paid work for people with disabilities, where the pay is near or at a standard competitive wage, and the individual is given the opportunity to work alongside and associate with nondisabled workers. A primary goal of these programs is to achieve integration of the worker with a disability. Appropriate integration is defined as when the proportion of individuals with disabilities in the workplace is similar to the proportion of these individuals in the general population (Wehman, 1988).

Supported employment also implies support on the job. This support generally takes the form of a 'job coach' (or employment specialist) who works with the employee with a disability, assisting and teaching him or her to do the job. The goal of this support is to enable the employee with a disability to work at a competitive rate, producing the same level of quality of goods or services as the non-disabled worker. When this goal is achieved, the individual with a disability is paid the same wages as non-disabled workers and is given opportunity for career advancement (Wehman, 1986; Hanley-Maxwell and Bordieri, 1989). The support is provided for as long as the employee needs assistance to achieve satisfactory levels of quality and productivity.

Employees with physical disabilities who need assistance in matters of self-care (e.g.: eating, toileting) may also receive 'Workplace personal care' support. Work-based personal care is to be distinguished from the type of support provided by the job coach and focussed on actual job performance.

Before the emergence of supported employment, almost the only work alternative for individuals with intellectual and other disabilities was sheltered workshops, where employees carried out simple tasks in a work environment much like a factory. They were generally paid minimal wages (e.g.: fifty cents an hour), were not subject to the typical demands of a nondisabled employee in a regular workplace (i.e.: demands for productivity and quality), and were not given an opportunity to mix with non-disabled workers other than the relatively small numbers of employees who filled positions of staff and supervisors. Prospects for career advancement were virtually non-existent (Rusch and Hughes, 1989). It should be noted that sheltered employment is still the most common work setting for people with disabilities and the working conditions described just above still prevail in most of the organisations.

¹ In this paper the term "supported employment" is used to include the two models of individual job placement Competitive Employment Training and Placement (CETP) and individual Supported Jobs (ISJ), as well as enclave, small business and work crew models common in Australia.

A preponderance of literature concerning supported employment has originated in the United States, as this is where this industry developed. Longitudinal studies conducted in that country have shown supported employment to be a viable alternative to sheltered employment (e.g.: Hill, Banks, Handrich, Wehman, Hill and Shafer, 1987), and the Australian government has implemented policies and funding strategies to promote its development in Australia.

A five year report on the nation-wide status of supported employment in the U.S. (Wehman, 1992) indicates that 49% of individuals with intellectual disabilities in supported employment have a mild disability, 36% fall within the moderate range of intellectual disability, 12% are classified as severely or profoundly disabled and the remaining 3% represent those with borderline intellectual disabilities. The majority of individuals with disabilities in supported employment are reported to be in individual supported jobs (73%), while 17.1% work in enclaves, 8.6% in mobile workcrews, and the remaining 1.3% in small business models (sometimes called entrepreneurial models). In both the U.S. and Australia the number of employees in supported jobs is increasing.

Advantages of supported employment

The advantages of supported over sheltered employment include financial benefits to the worker with a disability as well as to the government and to the taxpayer, and an opportunity to work with non-disabled peers (i.e.: co-workers who do not exclusively fill supervisory roles). This latter advantage enables the individual with a disability to be provided with community-appropriate role models and, consequently, to improve his or her ability to interact appropriately with non-disabled individuals (Wehman, 1986).

There is evidence that individuals with intellectual disabilities engaged in supported employment are likely to have higher self-esteem and better self-perceptions than people working in sheltered employment (Wehman and Moon, 1986).

Inge, Hill, Shafer and Wehman (1987) conducted a controlled study whereby they compared 20 workers with an intellectual disability who were referred for placement in competitive employment (supported employment, individual model) with 20 workers currently employed in sheltered workshops. Individuals in these groups were matched on sex, sensory involvement, physical involvement, functional level, parental support, inappropriate behaviours and work skill ability. The purpose of this study was to determine whether there were any changes in quality of life for an individual with an intellectual disability as a result of supported employment. The parents/guardians of the participants were surveyed before the study began and again at 9 and 15 months after commencement of the programme.

Over 15 months, statistical analyses indicated that the competitively employed individuals showed significant increases in community participation, social and vocational skills, and financial activity when compared to workers with an intellectual disability in sheltered workshops. Many parents and professionals are concerned that interaction with peers would decrease if the individual with a disability were removed from the sheltered environment where he/she has access to friends. However, this study has indicated that integration into the community actually increased after commencement of supported competitive employment, while it decreased for some of the workers from the control group (i.e. those who remained in sheltered workshops). Inge et al. (1987) suggests that this may indicate that work in a sheltered environment does not facilitate community participation.

The workers with an intellectual disability in competitive employment in this study learned to make use of public transport, thereby giving them greater community access. This allowed them to go and visit friends independently, as well as engaging in other community activities such as going to the movies, fast food restaurants and church activities. Parents of the individuals in sheltered environments more often reported that they had to supervise their son or daughter in community activities. The competitively employed group maintained social contact with friends outside working hours as well as increasing contact with non-disabled individuals. Parents of this group reported greater confidence in their adult children's ability to perform work and odd jobs for friends and neighbours. Parents also seemed to think that their sons and daughters had more self-esteem and confidence after job placement in supported employment. Significant financial benefits were also obtained; the likes of which are described below.

Cost-Benefit issues

Supported employment models stipulate wages higher than those generally paid in sheltered workshops and, therefore, provide financial benefits to the employee with a disability. Shalock, McGaughey and Kiernan (1989) compared wages of a large sample of workers with intellectual disabilities from sheltered workshops in the United States with another large sample engaged in supported employment. Workers in sheltered employment were found to work 20% fewer hours per week and receive 52% less pay per hour than individuals in supported employment. This increase in earnings with supported employment often results in the worker with a disability becoming more responsible for their earnings. Inge et al. (1987) found that workers in competitive employment began saving for major purchases, as well as using banking facilities more often than workers in sheltered environments. This appears to indicate an increase in financial independence. In contrast, parents of individuals in sheltered employment more often reported that they controlled their son or daughter's income while supplying them with a small allowance.

The supported employment model also provides financial benefits to the government and to society. The costs to the government of supported employment are initially higher than those of sheltered employment (Rusch, Tines, McCaughrin and Conley, 1989, 1990), but, since the support to the worker with a disability generally decreases over time and he or she also pays income tax, the supported employment model is more cost-effective in the longer term. Hill, Banks, Handrich et al (1987) found that over an eight year period supported employment in Virginia resulted in a \$2.21 return for every dollar spent on it. Hill, Wehman, Kregel, Banks and Metzler (1987), in an eight year longitudinal study of supported competitive employment for workers with moderate and severe disabilities (in the US), found an average return of \$1.24 for every dollar invested averaged over eight years. In its eighth year, for each dollar invested in the programme by the taxpayer, \$2.93 was returned. Rusch et al (1989, 1990) found that, in its first year, supported employment in Illinois produced a \$0.75 return to society and a \$0.66 return to the taxpayer for every dollar spent, and the workers with disabilities received a 37% increase in wages. This initial cost was shown to become a benefit after three to four years (Hill, Wehman, Kregel et al., 1987; Rusch et al., 1989).

A cost-benefit analysis of a supported employment program in Sydney suggests that results similar to those in the U.S. will be observed in Australia. Jobsupport is a supported employment program for individuals with intellectual disabilities located in Sydney, Australia. It has three units: One in Burwood, which opened in 1986, one in Artarmon opened in 1989 and one in Liverpool, opened in 1992. The unit in Burwood was subject to a cost-benefit analysis conducted by Coopers and Lybrand (Department of Health, Housing and Community Services, 1992). Results indicate that currently the net cost to the government per client in Jobsupport is less than the average cost per client in sheltered workshops. This is due in part to the fact that the government receives taxes

and Medicare levy from individuals engaged in supported employment. The costs to the government are expected to decrease over time until the unit has an optimum number of clients.

Since Jobsupport is one of the oldest supported employment programs in Australia, its per client subsidy from the Commonwealth government is lower than many other, younger programs. Many of these supported employment programs, in fact, currently receive higher per client subsidies than do sheltered workshops. These programs should be expected to become increasingly cost-effective as they gain experience.

The cost to the government of Jobsupport clients was not as low as the cost of clients on the disability pension only (i.e.: not employed at all), however, the disability pension is a cost which will rise over time and not decrease. Furthermore, there is general agreement that majorities of people with disabilities want to work and should be able to realise this preference. In other words, receiving a disability pension but no employment services is not considered to be a desirable alternative for a majority of people with disabilities.

Sheltered workshops tend to require substantial amounts of funding per employee and this does not decrease over time. A cost-benefit analysis of sheltered workshops in ten U.S. states revealed a mere four cent return to the taxpayer for every dollar spent and an eighteen cent return to society (Piuma and Zivolich, 1992). One of the reasons for this poor cost outcome is that sheltered workshops almost always operate at a financial loss. One of the factors believed to be responsible for this is the service delivery model under which they typically operate. It is believed that operations more consistent with strict business principles would allow workshops to be more financially viable.

Models of supported employment

There are four main models of supported employment (Wehman, 1986; Botterbusch, 1989). Theoretically, they all have as an ultimate objective employment in regular work settings, where the individual with a disability can perform at adequate levels of quality and productivity with or without ongoing assistance (depending on the model). Types of job placements for individuals with an intellectual disability tend to be predominantly in service industries, with a majority of the remainder being employed in factories (Brickey, Browning and Campbell, 1982). The models are as follows:

1. Individual supported employment model: This model of supported employment has been shown to be the most cost-effective of the four, and is the only supported employment model which mandates wages identical to those of a non-disabled worker in the same job (i.e. the standard or award wage). This model has been shown to produce the highest level of integration (Kregel, Wehman and Banks, 1989), as there are only one or two workers with disabilities in a regular workplace (i.e.: similar to percentage of people with disabilities occurring in the population). The model also tends to provide the greatest level and number of fringe benefits (West, Kregel and Banks, 1990), including sick leave, annual leave, health fund coverage, dental benefits, free or cost-reduced meals and various employee discounts. It is the only individual placement model out of the four, and was originally designed for individuals with severe disabilities. Individuals placed under this model, however, tend to have mild disabilities. This is primarily due to the fact that people with mild disabilities are believed to be easier to place in jobs (i.e.: are more acceptable to the employer) and are easier to train in the job than those with more severe disabilities. A secondary reason is that the training and support technologies necessary to assist more severely disabled employees is not sufficiently well developed. The remaining three employment models are group models.

2. Enclave (in industry) model: An enclave consists of a group of workers with disabilities who are integrated as a unit into a factory or other industrial setting. The group (by definition) includes eight or fewer individuals. This model provides some cost-benefit in terms of employing several workers simultaneously while engaging only one support worker or job coach (Moon and Griffin, 1988), but it has the disadvantage of providing a lower level of integration than the individual model (Kregel et al., 1989). This is because the ratio of disabled to non-disabled workers within a worksite is higher under this model, and also because the workers tend to be placed in one location and hence are isolated from the non-disabled workers. This model, like the individual model, was developed for individuals with severe disabilities (Wehman, 1988). In contrast to the individual model, individuals placed in enclaves do tend to have more severe disabilities. Because of their higher levels of disability, workers placed under the enclave model tend to need more supervision and support, tend to have lower levels of productivity, and receive lower wages than those in the individual model do. The fringe benefits in this model exceed those offered by the individual supported job model in some cases (West et al., 1990). A common criticism of this model is that the enclave in a normal industrial setting can end up resembling a small sheltered workshop (Botterbusch, 1989).

3. Mobile work crew model: A mobile work crew usually consists of a group of five individuals with disabilities (this number may vary slightly) and one supervisor, who carry out contract work at various locations in the community. They generally operate out of a van, and are most often involved in groundskeeping and janitorial work. This model provides a great deal of support and supervision, but allows the least amount of integration of the four models (Kregel et al., 1989). This is due to the fact that, while the crew is working in the community, they associate little (if at all) with non-disabled workers other than their supervisor. An advantage of this model is that the public is given the opportunity to observe citizens with disabilities working (Moon and Griffin, 1988). Fringe benefits appear to include a greater likelihood of receiving sick leave and annual leave than the other three models, although other benefits are less likely to be offered.

4. Small business/entrepreneurial model: This model consists of a business through which (a maximum of eight) individuals with disabilities provide a product or service. It differs from a sheltered workshop in two ways: it is generally significantly smaller than the typical workshop, and more emphasis is placed on productivity (work rate and quality of work), so the business is usually more financially viable than a workshop. The workers under the small business model tend to receive the poorest wages of the four models (Kregel et al., 1989), probably because of low productivity. West et al (1990) found that 95% of workers with a disability under this model receive no fringe benefits. The quality of integration supplied by this model is better than in a sheltered workshop, as workers with a disability are given the opportunity to associate with consumers from the general population who come into the business to purchase the product or service. While this model, by design, is appropriate for people with the most severe and profound disabilities (Moon and Griffin, 1988), findings indicate that 70% of employees in this model have mild or borderline disabilities (West et al., 1990).

The group models involve more flexible working hours than individual models and tend to cater to part-time workers. The individual supported model is directed at full-time employment and therefore is more likely to offer greater fringe benefits to employees.

What is required for a successful employment programme?

Wehman and Moon (1986) outlined the requirements, which must be met in order to provide long-term supported employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities. These

include: integrated work settings, vocational choices, competitive wages, paid work (no volunteer positions), jobs reflecting labour needs (i.e.: appropriate training in place of employment), parental involvement and support (necessary to help ensure the success of a placement), education of parents as well as potential workers on vocational options, and transition planning for students leaving school (ideally they should have a job organised for them when they leave).

McDonnell, Nofs, Hardman and Chambless (1989) looked at procedural components of supported employment, which appear to be associated with good employment outcome. They found reasonable correlations (range 0.64 to 0.72) between outcome and job matching procedures, job analysis procedures and design of the training programs. This implies that the job must be matched to the needs and abilities of the individual and that employment training for individuals with a disability should be systematically designed and implemented.

There are two general approaches to helping a person with disabilities find and keep a job. In the "train-place" model the worker is trained in the requisite job skills prior to being placed at the worksite. In the "place-train" model all training is done after placement, in the actual work setting. Szymanski, Hanley-Maxwell, Hansen and Myers (1988) criticise the train-place model primarily because of the requirement for the employee with disabilities to 'generalise' what is learned in the training setting to the work setting. Research indicates that people with intellectual disabilities can have difficulty generalising from one environment to another. Szymanski et al. (1988) attributes poor generalisation of training as being a contributor to poor employment success under the train-place model. They endorse the alternative, place and train, which avoid the difficulties faced by the individual with a disability of generalising from one environment to another.

Once an individual is appropriately placed and supported, his or her chances of job retention are good in the short term (65-75% over the first twelve months: Wehman, 1986). Job retention in the longer term, on average is not as good. Brickey, Browning and Campbell (1982, 1985) studied job retention in supported competitive employment for workers with intellectual disabilities two and five years after placement. After two years, an average of 33% of individuals (range 0% to 58%) still had their original position, although 60% of the original sample were still working, just not in the same position. After five years, the only individuals who were still competitively employed (33% of original sample) were those whose parents wanted them to work competitively. Of those whose parents were indifferent or negative, none were competitively employed. This may indicate that parental involvement and support is necessary for the retention of a job in supported employment.

More recent studies seem to indicate that job retention is improving. Inge et al. (1987) cite a programme in the U.S. which expected 74% of their supported employment service consumers to retain their job for longer than six months. They also draw reference to the 186 workers with intellectual disability in their own programme (at the Virginia Commonwealth University) who have retained their jobs for an average of 20 months.

Hill, Wehman, Hill and Goodall (1986) studied reasons for the separation of individuals with a disability from their jobs and found that those with IQ's in the mild range of intellectual disability lost their jobs mainly due to employee-related ('internal') difficulties (e.g.: inappropriate social behaviour, poor attendance, lack of motivation), while those with IQ's more representative of the moderate range of intellectual disability tended to lose their jobs due to 'external' reasons (e.g.: laid off due to recession, resignation due to parental influence). These data are consistent with other findings (e.g. the later findings of Zivolich and Shueman, 1988) that individuals with mild intellectual disabilities tend to exhibit more behavioural and social problems in the workplace than those with moderate intellectual disabilities. It could be noted that in their study of 200 supported

employees with intellectual disabilities, Zivolich and Shueman (1988) noted that none of the reasons for job separation were related to parent or caregiver influence.

Shalock, McGaughey and Kiernan (1989) found that intellectually disabled individuals who experienced greater integration in their supported employment settings were more likely to be receiving competitive wages, were less likely to have been in a non-sheltered setting prior to current placement, were living in urban areas and were also receiving fewer hours of job support. McDonnell, Nofs, Hardman and Chambless (1989) found additionally that integration also correlated positively with IQ (i.e.: higher IQ associated with superior integration), although the size of this correlation was small. Integration was also found to correlate most highly with the least restrictive type of residential placement and with the greatest number of hours worked per week. Higher wages were positively associated with IQ (again a relatively weak association), type of residential placement (the less restrictive the better) and access to transportation (McDonnell et al., 1989), as well as working more hours and being male (Shalock et al., 1989). Access to transport and residential status were stronger correlates of employment outcome than was IQ. This fact could be related back to the reasons for job separation (Hill et al, 1986; Zivolich and Shueman, 1988), in that those with higher IQ's within the range of intellectual disability tend to have motivation difficulties rather than skill deficiencies, so a higher IQ may not necessarily ensure a more positive outcome.

Hill, Hill, Wehman, Banks, Pendleton and Britt (1985) conducted a six year longitudinal study which looked at correlates of success in supported employment (success being defined as having retained the job for at least six months) of 155 workers with an intellectual disability. It was noted that while a larger amount of workers with mild intellectual disabilities were retained for less than six months, this difference was not significant. However, it is supportive of the findings from the later studies, mentioned above. The age of the worker seemed to not play a role in job retention. With respect to dual diagnosis, alcohol and behavioural problems did not seem to have an effect on duration of job retention, although those workers with an intellectual disability who were also diagnosed as schizophrenic had a significantly poorer rate of job retention after six months than did the other dual diagnosis groups and those without dual diagnosis. This was thought to be due to the lack of expertise of job coaches and employers with respect to working with people with psychoses. Additional physical handicaps appeared to have little effect on retention rate, and those with greater speech and language impairments were more likely to retain their job for longer than six months compared to those workers with an intellectual disability who exhibited clear speech (this difference was not significant). Finally, those workers with a disability who did not have a natural parent as guardian were found to be significantly more likely to have been retained in their job for longer than six months. Hill et al. (1985) cite anecdotal findings from job coaches which seem to indicate that the expectancies of parents regarding the success in supported employment of their son or daughter with an intellectual disability are poor.

Impediments to Supported Employment

Although supported employment seems to be a viable alternative for individuals with disabilities from both a financial (cost-benefit) and a social (integration) point of view, there remain 'barriers' which impede the transition of sheltered workshops and day placement centres from their current service delivery models to those of supported employment. Kiernan and Brinkman (1988) and Walton and Shueman (1991) outlined the obstacles ('structural impediments') to development of supported employment in the United States and Australia respectively. These include (lack of) technical expertise, economic variables and stakeholder attitudes.

The transition from current sheltered workshop and day placement models of service delivery to models of supported employment has been found to require a level of technical expertise which was generally not available to Many of these services.

The current economic recession has resulted in reduced profits from sales, as well as a higher level of unemployment. These and related economic factors have resulted in a resistance to change on the part of sheltered workshops due reduced job opportunities and an unwillingness to make commitments to changes which involve financial uncertainty (at least in the short term). Workers and their families also have concerns regarding loss of social security payments and medical benefits, which generally accompany entry into supported employment.

The structural impediment on which most research appears to have been focused is that of stakeholder attitudes. A stakeholder is any individual for whom change (in this case movement of a person with disabilities from sheltered to supported employment) is relevant, and includes the worker with a disability, his or her family, sheltered workshop and day placement centre employees, prospective employers, and the government. Some studies have indicated that consumers of sheltered workshop services express desires to remain in their current workplace over integrated settings because they have experienced social isolation in these latter settings.

Beare, Severson, Lynch and Schneider (1992) outline some of the impediments met by a small agency in the US engaged in supported employment, as well as their strategies for overcoming these. They cite a “developmental philosophy” as being an obstacle to successful supported employment. This can be defined as the belief that the individual must have all skills required for the job prior to placement (i.e.: previously discussed “train-place” method, thought to be inferior to “place-train” method).

Unwillingness of some workers to work with employees with a disability is another obstacle encountered by these employees with special needs. Many workers may feel uncomfortable or hostile toward working with an individual with an intellectual disability. Beare et al (1992) found this to be because workers resented the fact that an individual with an intellectual disability could do the same job and for the same pay they received. In a workplace containing many workers who think this way, it would not be unusual for the worker with a disability to feel socially isolated. This is also one of the greatest of parental concerns (see parent attitudes). Beare et al. (1992) solved this problem through the development of a “colleague” programme, whereby each placed worker with a disability was matched with a co-worker without a disability, in order to develop a working relationship and to increase social activities and opportunities. This plan was fully acceptable to all employers involved in the study, and offered remuneration to those co-workers who wished to be involved. It was discovered that those co-workers who became involved in the colleague programme did not want the added pay and thought it unnecessary. Job coaches were oriented in the philosophy and methodology of the programme and underwent inservice training of behavioural intervention skills. The supported employment programme was generally successful, with a reported 1200% increase in average wage earned by workers with a disability in the study over 5 years. Those who were competitively employed received regular (award) wages and worked at a 100% production rate.

Worker satisfaction

Literature concerning worker satisfaction in sheltered employment and supported employment generally indicates that those in supported employment improve on their daily living skills and economic activity to a greater degree and have a higher self-esteem than those individuals with intellectual disabilities who are employed in sheltered workshops (e.g.: Wehman,

Kregel, Shafer and Hill, 1987). Workers with intellectual disabilities in supported employment have been found to show improvement on standardised measures of language development, as well as an understanding of numbers and time, and have displayed an increase in economic activity once they have left sheltered employment for supported employment (Inge, Banks, Wehman, Hill and Shafer, 1988). Workers who changed to supported employment (all of whom were matched with sheltered workshop employees with respect to age and functional level) also displayed a substantial increase in community integration. Such improvements in lifestyle seem to be equated with an improvement in psychological well being (Jiranek and Kirby, 1990).

Sinnott-Oswald, Gliner and Spencer (1991) found that individuals with intellectual disabilities who were in supported employment had a greater number of leisure activities, were involved in these activities more often, had better perceptions of their own skill level at work and tended to have a significantly higher level of self-esteem than individuals working in sheltered workshops. The level of intellectual disability was matched across the two groups to avoid any effects due to IQ alone. Jiranek and Kirby (1990), however, found that self-esteem was similar between individuals with intellectual disabilities in supported employment and in sheltered workshops. They also found that supported employment led to greater job satisfaction but poorer psychological well being than individuals employed in sheltered workshops. Differences between these results and those obtained by Sinnott-Oswald et al (1991) may have been due to differences in the attitudes of non-disabled workers in the respective places of supported employment. More favourable (friendly) worker attitudes would be expected to result in the worker with a disability feeling more welcome in the workplace and hence developing better self-perceptions.

Dudley and Schatz (1985) studied the attitudes towards work of a sample of workers with a disability in a sheltered workshop. Just over half of the sample preferred to be at the workshop rather than elsewhere (i.e.: at home or in supported employment). The main reason for this was that many of the workers with a disability had friends at the workshop with which they wanted to spend time. The sheltered workshop is often the only opportunity for people with disabilities to associate with peers and feel socially accepted. Other reasons for wanting to remain in a sheltered workshop included fear of social isolation and ridicule (which for some had previously been encountered in the regular workplace), and having parents who were opposed to supported employment. Complaints made by the workers about sheltered workshops appear to reflect concerns regarding a lack of (challenging) work. Only a small percentage of the workers understood the purposes of the workshop in terms of its goal of increasing their individual capacities to become more employable and independent.

Social interaction in the workplace

There have been a few studies, which have looked at social interactions between employees in sheltered workshops. Berkson and Romer (1980) studied interactions between sheltered workshop employees during break times in four workshops in the US. Those workers with an intellectual disability who were observed in the study were noted to interact with co-workers most of the time during breaks. Their interactions were largely in pairs and occurred with a number of different co-workers. Lignugaris/Kraft, Salzburg, Stowitschek and McConaughy (1986) cite a 1984 study by Levy and Gloscoe in which workers with a disability in sheltered workshops and nondisabled factory workers were both found to interact a great deal as they performed assembly tasks or worked on production lines.

Lignugaris/Kraft et al. (1986) observed interactions between workers with a disability in sheltered workshops both during work hours and during breaks. It was generally found that participants interacted half as often during work as during breaks. Supervisors were present more

during work than during breaks. Proportionally more paired interaction occurred during work, while more group interactions (involving 3 individuals or more) occurred during breaks. Interactions were significantly longer during breaks.

In the second part of their study, Lignugaris/Kraft et al. (1980) observed social interactions in a non-profit business where half the employees were intellectually disabled and the other half were non-disabled elderly workers (mean age for non-disabled employees =61). There were found to be no statistically significant differences in social interactions between handicapped and non-handicapped workers. Again, social interactions during work were less frequent and tended to involve pairs while interactions during breaks more often involved three or more workers. It was concluded from this study that the workers with an intellectual disability had adapted well to their work setting. Since the literature suggests that group interactions as well as paired interactions often occur in production environments, individuals placed in these settings may be better equipped to adapt socially if they can interact in groups as well as pairs.

Employer attitudes

Successful supported employment requires the co-operation, understanding and support of employers willing to provide employment opportunities. The employer needs to be comfortable with the idea of having a job coach present at the jobsite for extensive periods of time while they provide workers with disabilities with instructions and assistance.

Shafer, Hill, Seyfarth and Wehman (1987) conducted research on the attitudes of employers of workers with an intellectual disability, based on surveys of 261 employers, mostly in the services industry. Generally, employers were found to hire workers with a disability due to a commitment that such individuals deserve the opportunity to work. This finding indicates that employers may be more responsive to employing workers with an intellectual disability than previously thought. Employers of workers in supported competitive employment were also influenced by services supplied by the job coach, as well as tax benefits.

The findings also suggested that employers saw their workers with intellectual disabilities as being reliable, dependable and punctual. While the employers tended to view the worker with a disability as slow to learn, unable to maintain expected levels of quality or perform a variety of different tasks, they seemed to be willing to allow less than desired performance from employees in return for reliable attendance and low position turnover. This was also found to be the case in another study by Shafer, Kregel, Banks and Hill (1987). It is also interesting to note that around 35% of workers with a moderate or severe level of intellectual disability were not identified as falling within this range of intellectual disability. This would seem to indicate that with the appropriate support services, workers who are moderately or severely intellectually disabled may be able to function at a reasonably high level of competence.

Employers of workers under supported competitive employment service delivery models tended to view their workers with an intellectual disability more positively than those employers of workers with an intellectual disability who were placed under a different model (i.e. did not have the support of a job coach). Over 60% of employers from the study sample reported that they would be interested in using a job coach in the future.

Parent attitudes

Parents have been seen as being the ultimate consumers of the services provided to their intellectually disabled children, both in terms of input (time, money, sacrifices and emotional investment) and output (child outcome). As such, they should be intimately involved in any programme serving their children. The growing emphasis on employment training with individuals who have intellectual disabilities has created an awareness of the importance of parents in this relatively new area of programming.

Although ideally the school student with an intellectual disability should have received some work experience and vocational training in the latter years of school, current change in emphasis from employment in a sheltered workshop to supported employment has led to changes in working conditions for many employees with an intellectual disability, to those more consistent with supported employment. This can have occurred after the worker with a disability may have spent several years working in sheltered employment, and whose education may have prepared them for this type of work. It can also be a difficult time for parents when they perceive their beliefs about what is best for their intellectually disabled children as being questioned.

Parents play a vital role in the selection of a job for their intellectually disabled son or daughter (Bruder, Pentecost, Pendleton, Cunningham, Porter and Jordan, 1985). This ranges from providing information to the job counsellor (Job coach) to deciding whether their disabled son or daughter would be happy in their workplace. Loss of social security benefits (e.g.: medical care), transportation and job rules are some of the factors taken into account when these decisions are made, especially if the individual with a disability is seen as not being able to effectively make these decisions for themselves.

Early studies on parent attitudes (e.g.: Nitzberg, 1974; Katz and Yekateil, 1974) found that parents tended to maintain dependence in their children with intellectual disabilities, making achievement of living skills more difficult in a rehabilitation setting. Parents also tended to keep their children with an intellectual disability within the framework of familiar company and not to trust them with increased independence. Ferrara (1979) concluded from these studies that not only can parents attitudes influence their intellectually disabled children's behaviour, but can also undermine the acquisition of behaviour skills identified by legislators and professionals as being desirable. Inge, Hill, Shafer and Wehman (1987) suggest that one of the reasons for this attitude in parents of workers with an intellectual disability is that parents tend not to have observed the competence level in their adult children which is necessary for a job. Traditionally, special education programmes have emphasised the problems that a person has, rather than trying to solve these difficulties through adaptations, job coaches or matching the individual's current skill level to the best possible job.

Another great concern for parents of workers with an intellectual disability is the loss of medical benefits associated with the loss of the disability pension. Many individuals with disabilities tend to have high medical bills, so this is a very important issue. Parents in Australia should be aware that their son or daughter with an intellectual disability can earn up to \$86 per week before it begins to affect their disability pension. For every dollar earned over this, the pension is reduced by 50 cents. The worker with a disability is entitled to full medical benefits as long as they are receiving even a small fraction of the maximum pension payment (\$317 per fortnight). This means that a worker with an intellectual disability would need to be earning \$720 per fortnight (\$360 per week) before they are no longer entitled to the disability pension or any of the associated benefits. This is very similar to the pension situation in the United States (Inge et al., 1987). This information is documented in the National Health Act of Australia, and, for further information, the local Social Security administration can be contacted.

Ferrara (1979) conducted a study whereby she obtained parents' attitudes towards normalisation activities (activities which facilitate community integration), looking for differences in response with respect to age, sex and level of disability of intellectually disabled individuals, as well as across different referents (persons with intellectual disabilities in general vs. my child with an intellectual disability). Parent attitudes towards normalisation activities were significantly more positive when referring to persons with intellectual disabilities in general than when referring to their own son or daughter. Effects of differing age and level of disability were seen to occur in the general referent group only. Greater positivity towards normalisation was seen in those parents of younger and more severely disabled children. Ferrara (1979) summarises by stating that although parents are supportive of the construct, they tend not to endorse it with respect to their own child (in particular those who see themselves as most likely to be immediately effected). This would seem to indicate a difference in attitude between theory and practice, which would need to be addressed in order for parents to be supportive of normalisation activities for their son or daughter with an intellectual disability.

Parents also play an important role in providing emotional support for their son or daughter with an intellectual disability while they are working, and especially during the first few months when the worker with a disability has to be trained in the job and also has to adjust to the working conditions of the new job. Beginning a new job is a stressful experience for anyone, and is even more difficult for individuals with an intellectual disability.

In order to help parents learn about the benefits of supported employment, the job counsellor could set up appointments with local social security officials, introduce the parents to the employer and employees, help teach transportation skills, and introduce the family to other families where an intellectually disabled member is working in supported employment. Assuring parents that their son or daughter will have someone with them until he/she has adjusted to the work site can also be of great help (Bruder et al., 1985), as well as keeping parents informed during this critical time.

Parents through the job counsellor rather than directly with the employer best deal with problems arising in the workplace. While it may be the employer's concern to care for the welfare of his/her employees, the primary interest is usually in running the business. An employer can develop negative perceptions of a worker with a disability whose parents become over-involved with the workplace and seek contact with the employer frequently (Bruder et al., 1985).

Hill, Seyfarth, Banks, Wehman and Orelove (1987) surveyed a large sample (N=660) of parents whose sons and daughters with intellectual disabilities were receiving disability services in one state in the U.S. Results showed that most parents indicated a preference for current services and expressed low interest in specific improvements in working conditions, especially increased wages. Only 12% of the sample indicated a preference for supported employment over the services their sons and daughters were then receiving. It would appear that parents of individuals with intellectual disabilities prefer a safe and secure environment for their sons and daughters. This attitude often seems also to be encouraged by the caretaking attitude of staff in sheltered workshops or day placement centres.

Because the successful supported employment of adults with an intellectual disability is a relatively recent development, most parents are unaware of the benefits and disadvantages of supported employment. Many have had their adult sons and daughters working in sheltered workshops for several years, and have adjusted their expectations to this type of work and job life.

New change can be seen as frightening, especially if parents perceive their children's happiness in the workplace as part of their (the parents') responsibility.

Social isolation has been reported by employees with an intellectual disability when entering supported employment. This has been primarily due to attitudes of co-workers. Current supported employment programmes would have some form of "colleague programme" (Beare et al., 1992) whereby the worker with a disability is matched with a co-worker without a disability in order to facilitate integration into the working environment, as well as to facilitate participation in social activities and opportunities. The co-worker can be offered some remuneration for this added service, although Beare et al. (1992) found that the co-workers were happy to participate in the programme without further payment. Attitudes towards workers with intellectual disabilities in the U.S. appear to be changing in a positive direction as supported employment programmes proliferate. This would be expected to occur in Australia as well.

Wehman, Kregel, Shafer and Hill (1987) argue that the main way to gain parental support and advocacy is to demonstrate that adults with an intellectual disability can hold jobs and be successfully integrated into the community. Additionally, parents need to know of the many benefits to the quality of life associated with supported and competitive employment.

Any approach to modifying parents' attitudes towards supported employment for their adult son or daughter with a disability (or towards supported employment per se) would require an educational component. This would serve to provide parents with up-to-date research and findings concerning the success of supported employment for individuals with an intellectual disability. In addition to this educational component, individual concerns should also be addressed. This whole process could occur in a group or seminar format, where the participants could benefit from hearing each other's concerns addressed. Many parents of workers with an intellectual disability have realised that their children do not need to be dependent throughout their lives, and are capable of achieving much more than previously thought possible. This would also be a great relief for some parents who have been told by professionals that they should expect to always take care of their children who have an intellectual disability.

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