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Overcoming Barriers to Assist Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities Obtain Employment Outcomes

Cassandra A. Payne

Southern Illinois University Carbondale, sandy.p72@siu.edu

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OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ASSIST INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL
DISABILITIES OBTAIN EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES

by

Cassandra A. Payne

B.S., Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, 1998

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
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Approved by:

William Crimando, Chair

Graduate School

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

This problem is an investigation into the low employment rates of individuals with intellectual disabilities. Employment specialists who help the individual with disabilities find jobs often use resources such as supported employment programs to assist in the process of obtaining and maintaining competitive employment. Supported employment programs have been proven to be effective in obtaining employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Dowler and Walls (2014) completed a study of 27 articles that evaluated supported employment programs and determined that “clients who received supported employment services were more likely to be become employed, to remain employed and/or to be employed at or above the minimum wage” (p. 19). In Illinois, supported employment programs for those with intellectual disabilities are funded through the Division of Developmental Disabilities under a Medicaid home and community based waiver program or through the Division of Rehabilitation. The intention of this paper is to review the current literature to identify the barriers and interventions for employment specialists to enable them to better assist individuals with intellectual disabilities when achieving their personal employment outcomes through supported employment programs in Illinois.

Significance of the Problem

Throughout history, equality in employment has always been a challenge for individuals with disabilities. Statistics indicate that only 19.8% of individuals with disabilities participate in the labor force compared to 68.3% of individuals without disabilities (U.S. Department of Labor [ODEP], 2015a). “In Illinois only six percent of the people with developmental disabilities are

employed in integrated settings” (Jansen, Picciola, & Taylor, 2014, p. i). The numbers are low especially when coupled with studies that indicate that individuals with disabilities are happier when they work and that it is more beneficial financially for them to do so. Jahoda, Kemp, Riddell, and Banks (2008) completed a review of studies that found consistently higher quality of life and well-being was reported by individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families when they were employed. In a study of 104,213 individuals with intellectual disabilities, Cimera (2010) found that becoming successfully employed proved to have greater financial benefits than costs for the individual.

Unfortunately many individuals with intellectual disabilities in Illinois are not participating in supported employment programs. In Illinois segregated workshops settings are often used as employment sites. These workshops often do not provide the skills the individual requires to obtain employment in the community (Jansen et al., 2014). Many studies indicate that attending a sheltered workshop is often more harmful than helpful for the employee with intellectual disabilities. Cimera (2011) studied the vocational outcomes of 4,904 supported employees and found that participating in a sheltered workshop prior to supported employment did not teach individuals with intellectual disabilities the skills to achieve better employment outcomes.

Barriers exist that are preventing individuals with intellectual disabilities in Illinois from working and therefore achieving personal employment outcomes. Supported employment programs are available but little success is noted in Illinois due to barriers that range from obstacles such as lack of job skills, to areas that currently require change within funding and policy. Employment specialists that work with individuals with intellectual disabilities must

understand these internal and external challenges that exist as well as strategies shown to be effective by research to address the challenge.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this project is to identify barriers for those with intellectual disabilities in obtaining their employment outcomes through Supported Employment Programs. This will be accomplished by a critical analysis of research that has been conducted regarding individuals with intellectual disabilities who participate in Supported Employment programs to accomplish personal employment goals. These specific questions will be addressed:

1. What are the specific barriers for individuals with intellectual disabilities when using Supported Employment Programs to accomplish career goals?
2. What interventions does research show to be best practices to alleviate the barriers identified?

Definition of Terms

Intellectual Disability (ID) is defined by WebMD (2015) as “below-average intelligence or mental ability and a lack of skills necessary for day-to-day living” (para. 1). The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (2013) provides a more detailed explanation, by including limitations in intellectual skills and adaptive behavior that includes conceptual, social, and practical skills. Intellectual Disability was formerly termed developmental disability or mental retardation. The term may be used interchangeably with the term cognitive disability. This disability affects about three percent of the general population according to statistics from the US Department of Health and Human Services (2014).

Supported Employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities is defined by the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (2015) as “Intensive, ongoing supports

that enable participants, for whom competitive employment at or above the minimum wage is unlikely absent the provision of supports, and who, because of their disabilities, needs supports, to perform in a regular work setting” (Service Descriptions section, para. 4). Two types of Supported Employment funding currently exists in the State of Illinois. A Supported Employment Program (SEP) is available through the DHS Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS). This program must be explored prior to applying for the other type of funding, DHS Developmental Disabilities Supported Employment Program.

Employment Outcomes are defined as the personal career goals identified by the person with intellectual disabilities.

Limitations of this Study

The scope of this project is to review the current literature to identify barriers as well as effective interventions that have been proven by research to assist those with intellectual disabilities in obtaining their employment outcomes through Supported Employment Programs. This program is specific to individuals who have been diagnosed with intellectual disabilities by a psychological evaluation and does not include those diagnosed with a primary diagnosis of a mental illness. Information concerning supported employment programs policy and funding will be specific to the state of Illinois.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the literature concerning specific barriers for individuals with ID when using Supported Employment Programs to accomplish employment outcomes was conducted. Research can be categorized into several main areas: lack of funding for Supported Employment Programs in Illinois, employer misconceptions, and lack of skills of the person with ID.

Funding for Supported Employment in Illinois

One of the initial and greatest barriers adults with ID face vocationally in Illinois is being able to understand the funding processes and then obtain the funding to receive assistance in locating, learning and maintaining a job. Funding of Supported Employment for individuals with an intellectual disability is lacking. Two different kinds of funding are available but both stream through the Illinois Department of Human Services. The option of funding that should be the most available to individuals with ID is offered through the Vocational Rehabilitation office. The other funding option is more difficult to obtain and is provided by a Medicaid home and community-based waiver program through the Division of Developmental Disabilities.

A time limited funding process for Supported Employment services exists through each local Department of Vocational Rehabilitation office in Illinois. The application process involves a vocational rehabilitation counselor deeming the person with intellectual disabilities eligible for services and opening a case for supported employment. According to Jansen et al. (2014) many of the counselors are apprehensive to open a case with a goal of supported employment. This statement is supported by the authors through data that indicates supported employment funding is only utilized by 4.3 percent of the individuals receiving vocational services. Butterworth et al. (2011) found that within the Vocational Rehabilitation system in

Illinois in 2010, only 560 of the 15,732 employment closures involved individuals with ID and of those 340 had a goal of supported employment. Supported employment funding through vocational rehabilitation in Illinois appears to be fairly easy to obtain, but data indicate it is not utilized; therefore it is not benefiting the majority of individuals with ID. According to state regulations this type of funding for supported employment must be explored through the vocational rehabilitation prior to applying for the other type of funding offered by the Division of Developmental Disabilities. One component of applying for the funding is that the vocational rehabilitation counselor must write a letter indicating that supported employment services are denied or that short-term supported employment services are being terminated and the individual needs to DHS long-term services (Illinois Department of Human Services, 2015c).

Supported Employment through the Division of Developmental Disabilities is difficult to obtain in Illinois. It can be a possible vocational component as part of a Medicaid waiver funding process. This funding is not readily available and is based solely on a Prioritization for Urgency of Need for Services (PUNS) system. This system is a waiting list of individuals with intellectual disabilities in Illinois who have applied for and are awaiting services. Funding is only received when the individual's name is selected from the waiting list (Illinois Department of Human Services, 2015e). If an individual is awarded the Medicaid waiver funding they may apply for supported employment. Funding for a sheltered workshop/developmental training services is presumed with Medicaid waiver but not employment services (Jansen et al., 2014). Once this funding is obtained the individual with ID is limited in the amount of funded hours to 115 hours per month with a total of 1100 hours per fiscal year although unlike the funding available through vocational rehabilitation, this funding has no time limit and can be life-long (Illinois Department of Human Services, 2015a). This type of supported employment funding is

difficult to obtain and similar to the funding offered by vocational rehabilitation it appears to be underutilized as well. According to Butterworth et al. (2011), of the 26,280 individuals with ID served through the Division of Developmental Disabilities in employment services in 2010 only 10% are served in integrated employment. In addition the authors note that 14,984 individuals were on a waiting list at that time.

Employer Misconceptions

Once the barrier of understanding and then obtaining funding for a supported employment program is overcome, other obstacles arise when people with ID attempts to secure employment that meets their personal wants and needs. A common barrier cited in research is that many employers are hesitant to hire due to many different misconceptions or myths about the skills and abilities of the person with ID. Potential misconceptions or myths often result in ranking all individuals with ID into one group all with the same characteristics. Grouping persons with ID in this manner allows an employer to believe myths such as all individuals with ID do not have the ability or skills to perform certain jobs or all cannot read at acceptable levels (Ju, Zhang, & Pacha, 2011).

Misconceptions and myths can lead to employers associating certain risks with individuals with ID or those with any disability in general at the workplace. One of the more common risks discussed in literature is the risk of injury or overall safety risks. Morgan and Alexander (2005) surveyed employers with and without experience in hiring individuals with ID and found that both groups cited the most frequent concern about workers with disabilities were safety issues. The authors found that even employers who want to hire often fear that the individual with disabilities will have accidents and therefore raise their worker's compensation rates.

Perceived costs of providing any needed accommodation for a person with any disability is often an employment barrier. Kaye, Jans, and Jones (2011) studied companies that are not known to hire those with disabilities and found the most reported barrier was perceived cost of accommodations. Small, medium and large employers within the leisure and hospitality industries noted the cost of the accommodation was a hiring concern (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012) as well as employers within healthcare and retail (Hernandez et al., 2008). When comparing opinions of employers in 1998 with those in 2011, Erickson, von Schrader, Bruyère, and VanLooy (2014) found even a slight increase in the percentage of HR professionals who believe the cost of accommodations is a hiring barrier.

Employers want employees who are productive and those that can perform with little supervision. Along with perceived costs of accommodations, managers associate costs of loss of productivity with hiring individuals with disabilities (Hernandez et al., 2008; Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012) as well as the cost of providing extra supervision (Graffam, Shinkfield, Smith, & Polzin, 2002). An employer may not hire because they believe the employee will require more monitoring than those without ID to complete work correctly (Burge, Ouellette-Kuntz, & Lysaght, 2007). Rather than focusing on the skills and abilities of the individual, employers may focus on what the employee is unable to do if a visible disability is noted (Henry, Petkauskos, Stanislawzyk, & Vogt, 2014). There is a fear that more supervisory time will have to be spent for the employee and they would not be able to do the same amount of work as the person without a disability (Kaye et al., 2011; Peck & Kirkbride, 2001).

Lack of skills of individuals with Intellectual Disabilities

Barriers for individuals with ID can be associated with the lack of vocational skills that present challenges in finding and maintaining competitive employment. The perception of the

lack of ability is often present with employers during the hiring process. Employers may be concerned that the individuals are incapable of performing the job (Henry et al., 2014) or they lack the skills and experiences needed for the job (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012) simply on the basis of having a disability. This misconception is present with employers but also with individuals with ID and their families and even staff working with these individuals in rehabilitation settings. Migliore, Grossi, Mank, and Rogan (2008) found that 55% of families and 59% of individuals with ID reported they chose sheltered workshops instead of outside employment due to issues with work skills. Pirttimaa and Saloviita (2004) studied barriers to supported employment services and found denial of supported employment services was given by service providers most commonly due to lack of the skills of the individual.

Many individuals with ID in Illinois continue to participate in sheltered workshops receiving developmental training services. Data in 2010 indicated that 20,038 of the 26,280 individuals served by employment agencies were placed in facility based non-work settings and an additional 3,462 individuals were placed in facility based work settings (Butterworth et al., 2011). It remains controversial as to whether or not participating in these settings helps the individual with ID learn the adequate vocational skills needed to be successful in supported employment. When comparing individuals who participated in sheltered workshops with those who did not, Cimera (2011) found that individuals who participated in sheltered workshops earned less, worked fewer hours and overall cost more to serve in the community. It is known that sheltered workshops primarily funded under developmental training through the Medicaid waiver program in Illinois were not designed to be training sites to prepare for competitive employment but as training sites for improvement of daily living skills (Jansen et al., 2014).

Therefore given these facts many individuals with ID in Illinois are in need of training to allow them to learn the necessary vocational skills to assist them with employment.

Individuals with ID are often lacking the social skills that are necessary for integration into the workplace. Each workplace has a distinct culture and therefore it is necessary to understand the way in which co-workers communicate. Lack of knowledge about social skills often makes it difficult to form relationships at work (Irvine & Lupart, 2008) and understand the workplace culture. Holmes (2003) analyzed workers with ID and found deficits in overall exchanging small talk, learning the norms for when it is appropriate, understanding the cues when it starts and ends, and how to respond to others during conversational speech.

Interventions for Identified Barriers

A review of the literature concerning specific interventions that can be considered possible solutions for each of the barriers identified for individuals with ID when using Supported Employment Programs to accomplish employment outcomes was conducted. Interventions can be categorized into several main areas: changes within policy/funding for supported employment, utilization of a qualified supported employment agency that employs employment specialists, education of employers regarding individuals with ID and education of individuals with ID.

Changes within Policy/Funding for Supported Employment

Funding for Supported Employment Services in Illinois exists from two departments of the state government (Vocational Rehabilitation and Division of Developmental Disabilities) and they do not appear to work in conjunction to help provide a meaningful training experience for the person with ID. The funding through Vocational Rehabilitation is time-limited whereas funding through the Medicaid Waiver Program is long-term. Jansen et al. 2014 noted that in

Illinois when the time limited funding ends “transitioning between funding streams is difficult and cumbersome” (p. ii). Many states deliver employment services for individuals with ID utilizing both of the funding components. Professionals involved in employment services should advocate for Illinois to adopt systems comparable to several states in which vocational rehabilitation funds are used for job development and initial placement and long term supports are provided by state Medicaid waiver funds (Hall, Freeze, Butterworth, & Hoff, 2011).

Requirements for funding for individuals with ID in the state of Illinois mandate that the process must begin with Vocational Rehabilitation. It is noted in the research regarding barriers of funding that often counselors are apprehensive about opening a case for supported employment. Community Rehabilitation Providers must advocate for supported employment by addressing the possible reasons counselors do not open the cases with state officials within the Department of Rehabilitation. Training given to vocational counselors and employment specialists on guidelines of funding between the two funding sources, eligibility requirements, and billing procedures could address many concerns for initiation of supported employment services (Jansen et al., 2014).

Policy changes that reinforce the philosophy of competitive employment rather than sheltered workshops for individuals with ID must be advocated for with policymakers in Illinois. The funding mechanism through the Division of Developmental Disabilities in Illinois allows automatic funding for developmental training component but supported employment must be applied for separately following a procedure. An individual with ID who has obtained Medicaid waiver funding can attend a sheltered workshop but cannot utilize supported to be competitively employed unless the application procedures are met for supported employment. Cimera (2011) found that sheltered workshops do not teach an individual with ID skills to enable them to be

more employable, the individual makes less money in a sheltered workshop and the cost of providing the service is greater. Therefore providing services for supported employment is more beneficial to the person with ID, employers and the community when compared to services provided by a sheltered workshop.

Qualified Supported Employment Agencies

The first intervention to address many of the barriers faced when individuals with ID participate in supported employment programs is the utilization of qualified community rehabilitation practices (CRPs). These organizations employ employment specialists to provide support services to help the person with ID achieve their employment outcomes. Employment specialists use an array of support services that should include implementation of individualized formal and informal support strategies to aid the employee. Formal strategies can be a job coach to help the individual learn the job duties or specialized equipment to aid in communication, learning and understanding tasks and informal strategies are ordinary practices such as flexibility, encouragement and structure used to help the individual transition in the workplace (Irvine & Lupart, 2008).

Due to the many perceived risks an employer may feel more encouraged to hire those with intellectual disabilities if assistance and support is available. When a CRP provides the necessary assistance and guidance to the employer to help them understand individuals with disabilities and their individual needs they will most likely be more receptive to hiring (Gilbride Stensrud, Vandergoot, & Golden, 2003). Within the employment process hiring professionals may not have the time to provide the training for the individual or to prepare the workplace to support the individual with intellectual disabilities therefore vocational rehabilitation specialists are relied upon (Lysaght, Ouellette-Kuntz, & Lin, 2012). The CRP can assist the employer with

staffing and employee relation responsibilities including providing advice on ADA rules and regulations involved within the human resource department of the community business (Post et al., 2010). For employers identifying qualified applicants, providing consultation and assistance during the hiring process and throughout employment is ranked as very important (Graffam et al., 2002; Hernandez et al., 2008). Providing additional training and support through supported employment programs will make the placement more beneficial for the individuals as well as more financially beneficial for the employer (Peck & Kirkbride, 2001).

According to Gustafsson, Peralta, and Danermark (2013), who studied supported employment organizations, summarized the support needs provided to the employer by the qualified CRP as “roles of broker, guide and troubleshooter” (p. 103). The CRP identifies the skills and abilities of the person with disabilities, provides any needed education for job preparation, matches these skills to needs of employer, and finally secures the placement. While providing continued support the CRP enables the person with disabilities to learn the job position on the job, makes adjustments as needed to meet the needs of the employer, assists the employer with understanding the needs of the person with disabilities, and facilitates development of natural supports. Finally, the CRP prepares for any actual problems that may arise but at the same time maintains employer confidence that if a problem were to arise assistance will be provided (Gustafsson et al., 2013).

Employment specialists who are employed by CRPs must advocate for employers to focus on the skills of the individual rather than their disability if they are to disprove misconceptions about individuals with disability especially those related to performance (Henry et al., 2014). Knowledge of employers with little experience employing those with ID will help the employment specialist be prepared to address the misconceptions (Ju, Roberts, & Zhang,

2013). Matching the job skills of the qualified individual with ID and the needs of the employer must occur if the placement will mutually benefit the individual and the employer. When facilitating a placement the specialist must ensure the needs and abilities of the individual with disabilities matches the philosophy of the employer especially in regard to work cultural issues, appropriateness of job match and the level of support the employer is willing to provide (Gilbride et al., 2003).

Employment specialists will play a vital role in providing education to help employers understand and implement new federal requirements. Federally, changes have been made to Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act that may benefit individuals with ID participating in supported employment programs. These regulations will be applicable to employers who hold federal contracts or subcontracts of \$10,000.00 or over. The regulations establish a 7% utilization goal for qualified individuals with disabilities for each job groups or entire workforce depending on the number of employees of the business; documentation of the number of individuals with disabilities who apply, are hired and are currently within workplace; invitation of applicants to confidentially identify as a person with a disability; and provide access for review to determine compliance with the regulations (United States Department of Labor, [OFCCP], 2015).

Employer Education

Research indicates that employers tend to view individuals with ID into one of three categories: “negative or inadvertent stereotyping, disengagement from any process that might put in the contact with individuals with intellectual disability, or favorable hiring disposition based on specific experience” (Luecking, 2011, p. 264). Therefore education for employers is vital to disprove stereotypes and educate about the value and benefits of employees with ID if supported

employment programs are going to be successful. Employers should understand that many various levels of needs, skills, capabilities, and overall vocational interests exist within individuals who are diagnosed with ID (Lysaght et al., 2012). One of the main reasons employers might not hire and retain workers with disabilities is lack of awareness of how to meet the needs of the person with disabilities (Kaye et al., 2011). Hunt and Hunt (2004) found that knowledge and attitudes toward individuals with disabilities in the workplace could be improved by education even after only a one-hour presentation.

The education process should include input from the employers who have experienced positive on the job experiences with individuals with disabilities. Businesses that employ individuals with ID in particular often are satisfied. Morgan and Alexander (2005) found that when 159 employers who have hired individuals with ID previously were asked if they would hire again, 97% reported they would. Many employers including leading corporations have discovered the benefits and profitability when employing these individuals. Corporations such as Marriott International have realized they should include a diverse workforce since their customer base is diverse and Verizon Wireless has found that turnover is lower when employing those with disabilities therefore they are saving money on recruiting, hiring and training (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012).

Organizations that have taken the lead in employing individuals with disabilities such as Walgreens should be used to as examples in when educating businesses (Ellenkamp, Brouwers, Embregts, Joosen, & Van Weeghel, 2015). Walgreens Distribution Centers employs many individuals with disabilities and has proven many of the myths and misconceptions to be false. With motivation of a family member with disabilities, a senior executive set out to employ those with disabilities while demonstrating that productivity levels are maintained and staff turnover

rates are lowered (Kaletta, Binks, & Robinson, 2012). The authors found that Walgreen's viewed the importance of working with organizations with a vested interest in creating employment for individuals with disabilities, development of work areas that were accommodating, and a culture that was supportive of those with disabilities.

Employer fears of safety hazards, more workplace accidents and related increases of Worker's Compensation rates are part of the misconception barrier and must be addressed in training process. Despite these employer concerns a study by Lysaght, Sparring, Ouellette-Kuntz, and Marshall (2011) found that individuals with intellectual disabilities were less likely compared to those without disabilities to have reportable on the job injuries. When studying public views of employment of people with intellectual disabilities, Burge et al. (2007) found that 85% of the public who felt integrated employment was best for individuals with intellectual disabilities did not view safety problems or accidents as a concern. At Walgreens, every employee regardless of disability must be trained based on the job description and successfully pass a safety evaluation based on training provided (Kaletta et al., 2012). The authors found this culture of safety at Walgreens has resulted in a documented lower cost of worker's compensation claims for individuals with disabilities when compared to costs of those without disabilities. Olson, Cioffi, Yovanoff, and Mank (2011) found that employers who employ individuals with ID rate the cost of workers with and without ID to be the same.

When hiring individuals with ID employers believe the cost of providing any accommodation is higher than they can afford which is a misconception. By providing facts countering misconceptions, education can help the employer to understand that in actuality hiring individuals with ID can be financially advantageous. In a study conducted by Job Accommodation Network (JAN) employers did not report cost as a factor when providing

accommodations but did reported that providing the workplace accommodations helped to retain qualified employees and increased productivity for the worker, the company, morale and interactions with coworkers (Hartnett, Stuart, Thurman, Loy, & Batiste, 2011). During focus groups for administrators who had experience employing individuals with disabilities they reported that many accommodations are without cost and several accommodations cost under \$500.00 and in addition they noted an employer benefit of low absenteeism (Hernandez et al., (2008).

Loss of productivity and more required supervisory time is a common belief that employers have concerning hiring individuals with ID. They believe that hiring the individual will not be financially beneficial. Productivity and extra supervisory time do not have to be costs to the employer if supported employment programs are utilized. Embrace hotels uses funding provided by the government to financially cover the costs of additional training which assists the employee with disabilities to “acquiring new skills, building confidence and gradually assuming more responsibilities” (Gröschl, 2013, p. 121).

Employers that have employed individuals with disabilities have discovered numerous benefits that should be communicated to potential employers. Employers within the healthcare, hospitality and retail sectors have reported employees with disabilities to “loyal, reliable and hardworking” (Hernandez et al., 2008) and that hiring these individuals sends a positive message to their customers. Consistent attendance at work (Morgan & Alexander, 2005) has been found to be an advantage. Employees with ID can be attributed to low absenteeism, better rates of staff turnover and little to no work injuries (Andrews, 2005). Experienced employers who have hired individuals with ID have used the words dedicated, valuable, respectful and a positive role model

(Irvine & Lupart, 2008) and have noted “they are competent workers, add to company diversity and improve the public image of the company” (Olson et al., 2001, p. 130).

Other financial benefits of hiring an individual with an ID can be provided to the employer. Employers should be informed of Work Opportunity Credit that allows a tax credit of up to \$6000.00 of paid wages of a person with a disability during the first year of employment (Rudstam et al., 2014). Hiring individuals with disabilities can impact the success of a business since in general the public would prefer to give their business to companies who hire individuals with disabilities. A national survey of the public found that consumers value social responsibility and view hiring individuals with disabilities as positively as protecting the environment and providing health care for employees (Siperstein, Romano, Mohler, & Parker, 2006).

Education of Individual with Disabilities

Through the literature review it was discovered that a barrier to supported employment programs for those with ID was lack of vocational skills. To address this barrier a supported employment program should include a training component of vocational skills that is developed based on the needs of the supported employee. Education on general skills needed on the job such as responsibility, decision making, having a positive attitude, accepting instructions, and workplace communication can increase workplace integration (Vilà, Pallisera, & Fullana, 2007). The factor rated as the most important by employers when deciding to hire and retain a person with a disability was appropriate grooming and hygiene (Graffam et al., 2002). Employers rate the skills of personal integrity/honesty, following instructions, being on time, and adherence to safety procedures as important skills of employees with and without disabilities (Ju et al., 2011).

If deficits in any of these areas are noted, an individualized training program should be developed to address educational concerns.

Gilbride et al. 2003 they found that second to qualified workers, employers wanted employees who had acceptable soft skills. A training program titled “*Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success*” teaches soft skills to individuals with disabilities (United States Department of Labor, [ODEP], 2015b). This training addresses areas of communication, enthusiasm and attitude, teamwork, networking, problem solving and critical thinking, and professionalism that are taught using videos, classroom lecture and hands on exercises. It was designed for youth with disabilities 14-21 years of age but can be adapted to meet the individual learning needs of the person with ID.

Safety is noted as one of the more common fears of employers when employing individuals with ID as well as individuals without disabilities. Training on safety issues is beneficial to the employer but is essential for accident prevention for the person with ID. Proper training on safety should be provided prior to placement in an employment setting while participating in a supported employment program. A four-hour training program called “*Staying Safe at Work*” was developed specifically for individuals with ID (Dewey, Bush, & Miara, 2009). This program is designed in a manner that is repetitive, hands-on, with visual demonstrations and easy to understand to help the individual with ID learn to recognize and avoid common hazards in the workplace, know how to respond to emergencies and how to proactive in reporting potential hazards at work.

Training on the job by a job coach is an essential component to a supported employment program. Individuals with ID will all have a different learning style therefore training will need to be individualized. Embrace hotels employ a workforce comprised of over 50% who are

individuals with disabilities. They suggest teaching tasks in smaller components with single step instructions, using repetition, pictures and symbols to replace written words, and gradual introduction of any change are general strategies for training (Gröschl, 2013). In addition they found that short-term performance goals along with immediate feedback about how well employees were performing were motivating strategies. The job coach should teach, assist, encourage, motivate and provide extra supervision but should refrain from doing the job for the person with ID (Irvine & Lupart, 2008). Factors that affect learning of vocational skills are that individuals with ID can learn skills slower than others without ID, may have difficulty when job routines change (Lysaght et al., 2012) and may require a more structured environment (Irvine & Lupart, 2008).

Learning the skills necessary to perform a job is one component of the workplace. Another component that plays a vital role for the individual with ID is the social environment of the workplace. Deficits in social skills for the person with ID can hinder development of relationships with coworkers and over communication with others in the workplace (Irvine & Lupart, 2008). There are practical easy to understand techniques that job coaches can use to assist workers with ID on the job with social deficits. JAN (2013) suggests using role-play, training videos and modeling to demonstrate appropriate social skills individuals with ID will need in their particular workplace.

An essential duty of the job coach in the supported employment process is to assist with developing the environment on the job in a manner that promotes adequate acceptance of the person with disabilities through a natural support process (Lysaght et al., 2012). To build natural supports the individual with ID will require training of social skills. Opportunities to observe

and practice to learn the skills of small talk and conversational speech with others should be provided by job coaches to help the individual integrate into the workplace (Holmes, 2003).

Simultaneously to teaching social skills to the person with ID the job coach must increase awareness to the work environment to help supervisors and co-workers communicate better with the individual. Employers report that training provided for coworkers when employing individuals with ID is beneficial (Olson et al., 2001). Providing disability awareness training for all employees will help increase sensitivity to the needs of the employee (JAN, 2013). Novak, Rogan, and Mank (2011) suggest that changing the attitudes of the environment is as important in social skill development as training the individual with ID. The co-workers can support the individual with ID on the job by performing roles of teacher, advocate, and friend. In addition the involvement of coworkers has found to have positive effects on not only employment outcomes of integration but also wages for individuals with ID (Mank, Cioffi, & Yovanoff, 2000).

CHAPTER 3

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

As stated previously there are many barriers to supported employment. These range from within the funding structure of Illinois to misconceptions of employers about hiring individuals with ID. Therefore it is necessary to understand each barrier and look at possible corresponding interventions for each if employment outcomes will be accomplished. It is proposed that employment specialists must consider all best practices available if we expect to increase the number of individuals with ID to be competitively employed in Illinois.

The caseloads of CRPs across the United States are comprised of approximately 75% of individuals with ID (Domin & Butterworth, 2013). Supported employment for those with severe disabilities has been funded and actively a component of vocational rehabilitation since the amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1986. As stated previously, current statistics indicate that only a small percentage of individuals with ID are served within a supported employment program in each of the two funding sources in Illinois. These statistics for employment show little progress vocationally for those with ID.

Funding of supported employment programs in Illinois is the initial barrier to integrated employment for many individuals with ID. Although Illinois has two streams of the funding available both have their own set of obstacles. Funding offered through the Department of Rehabilitation was recently extended to 24 months from 18 months but this continues to require a schedule of reduction of support hours provided to the individual (Jansen et al., 2014). In many cases the individual with ID will require supports that are long-term especially in times when changing job duties are anticipated. Funding provided by the Division of Developmental

Disabilities includes no rules for reduction of support but as stated earlier the funding is extremely difficult to obtain in Illinois.

Professionals working with individuals with ID must understand the complex funding mechanisms and remain current on applicable changes within guidelines to properly assist the individual in obtaining supported employment services. All individuals involved with the individual with ID including school system and vocational professionals must advocate and prepare for vocational funding by advocating for enrolling on the PUNS process at a young age. One of the criteria used to determine who is selected for funding is based on how long the individual has been enrolled in the process (Illinois Department of Human Services, 2015e). Individuals who enroll at a young age may have better expectations of selection by working age.

Often rehabilitation facilities will jointly provide the service of sheltered workshop and supported employment. When comparing the list of providers who provide both developmental training and supported employment on the Illinois Department of Human Services website, 54 facilities were found (2015d). As stated earlier when an individual has received funding for a sheltered workshop through a Medicaid waiver program in Illinois they can apply for supported employment funding by providing additional approval requirements. Therefore if the provider offers both these services and funding can be obtained we have to wonder by the number of individuals utilizing supported employment services to be employed in the community in Illinois remains low.

When comparing the data of individuals with ID who participate in sheltered workshops and those who participate in supported employment in Illinois that was cited earlier it is obvious that many more individuals participate in sheltered workshops. One possible reason could be that families and individuals with ID may not be provided with the option of supported

employment. Migliore et al. (2008) found the 22% of families and 20% of individuals were not encouraged to participate in integrated employment when studying individuals with ID who attended 28 sheltered workshops. Changes noted in this research must begin within the facilities that serve individuals with ID if they are to achieve their desired employment outcome of competitive employment.

When an individual with ID does receive funding for supported employment services, the CRP should deliver services in a way that best assists the individual in finding and retaining a career. The services should be based on the person's skills, abilities, wants and needs and therefore enable the individual to be satisfied with their career choice. Like any other category of people, individuals with ID cannot be labeled with identical characteristics; each is unique with their own set of characteristics. Supported employment services have a mission to convince employers that individuals with ID should be not stereotyped negatively and each should be judged by their performance rather than by their disability.

Supported employment programs have a responsibility to evaluate the vocational training needs of the person with ID prior to placement within an employment setting. As stated in earlier all employers require certain entry-level skills when hiring an employee regardless of disability such as appearance on the job, safety, time management, attitude, and safety. An individualized training program must be developed within supported employment programs based on identified needs to prepare the individual for employment. These skills should be taught in a manner that is appropriate for the person with ID prior to obtaining a job and continually addressed by a job coach while on the job. Without knowledge of areas of deficits for each individual supported employee, proper supports cannot be provided which may result in a negative vocational experience for the employee and the employer.

Employers should feel confident in relying upon employment specialists to assist them in finding and maintain dependable, qualified employees. The employment specialist should approach employers with an attitude that they are the “suppliers of needed human capital and talent” (Rudstam et al., 2014, p. 200). Even though there is not always a perfect match between skills the person with ID and the needs the employer job matching is essential. All employers regardless of the disability are searching for employees who are qualified and therefore can perform the essential duties of the job with or without accommodations (Gilbride et al., 2003). Providing potential employees whose skills match those needed by the employer will allow the employment specialist to build and maintain partnerships with employers. An established trusting relationship can allow the employment specialists to help the employer understand that perceived costs of loss of productivity and more supervisory time will be unlikely and ultimately influence their attitudes and beliefs in hiring qualified individuals with ID.

A constant assessment of the job market is required by the employment specialist to remain current on the opportunities available within the workplace for potential employees. The skills of the individuals with disabilities within the caseload must be matched to the job descriptions of the openings identified within the job market. Modern technology of online sites, email and texting allows employment specialists to remain up to date on new developments in the workplace. Given this technology, specialists should always remember the importance of face-to-face contact with employers by meetings, business tours, job fairs, and community events to build relationships with employers to understand their individual hiring needs (Henry et al., 2014).

Working relationships with employers must be a continual process of developing and maintaining the relationships to appropriately advocate for the benefits of hiring an individual

with ID. In reality the employment specialist must view the person with disabilities and the employer as their customer if they are to properly advocate and meet the needs of the person with ID (Peck & Kirkbride, 2001). Since the employer is a customer the specialist has a responsibility to provide necessary guidance and support for them as well throughout the employment process to ensure the employment agreement is successful. This should entail education for the employer and workplace about intellectual disabilities, arrangement of any necessary accommodation, financial benefits such as tax credits, and overall rules and regulations regarding hiring of individuals who have a disability. Specialists must be knowledgeable concerning these areas, understand how they apply to various employers and finally how to convey them in a supportive encouraging manner.

CRPs have a responsibility to advocating for individuals with ID to employers but also within communities. Education should be provided to the community in general to help the address misconceptions (Irvine & Lupart, 2008). A study of 680 citizens to access public views on employment of individuals with ID found that many opinions were based on misperceptions about individuals with disabilities (Burge et al., 2007). Any opportunity to participate in public awareness events to increase knowledge about individuals with ID and benefits of hiring will be will be valuable.

Given the amount and cost of turnover in today's market in entry level jobs it is time to look at the market of employees that have extreme potential but are grossly underutilized. According to the 2013 Disability Status Report for Illinois, 12.3% of individuals with intellectual disabilities approximately 23,800 people are currently unemployed but actively for work (Erickson, Lee, & von Schrader, 2014). Research stated indicates these employees with ID have proven to be qualified for many job positions. The possibilities are numerous as long as the

skills of the person with ID are matched with the job needs of the employer. The documented direct and indirect benefits to the employer despite all myths and misconceptions include excellent attendance rates, low incidents of on the job injuries, and low turnover rates. These are attributes in an employee that all employers desire. With the assistance of supported employment programs this population of individuals is ready, capable and willing if only given the opportunity.

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VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University

Cassandra A. Payne

sandy.p72@siu.edu

Southern Illinois University
Bachelor of Science, Social Work, May 1998

Research Paper Title:

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