

# RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

## *Customized Employment*

Luecking, D. M., Gumpman, P., Saecker, L., & Cihak, D., (2006). Perceived quality of life changes of job seekers with significant disabilities who participated in a customized employment process. *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*, 37(4), 22-28.

### **BOTTOM LINE**

Thirty individual job seekers with disabilities participated in a customized employment process. Each job seeker was asked to rate their quality of life before they participated in the customized employment process, three months after participating in the process, and six months after participating in the process. Quality of life was measured using a modified version of Conroy's *Quality of Life Changes Scale* (2001). Through interviews with either the job seeker or a related community rehabilitation support worker, the authors found positive changes in 13 quality of life indicators as a result of participating in a customized employment process. This research supports the notion that customized employment contributes to improved quality of life for individuals with disabilities.

# Beach Center on Disability

Making a Sustainable Difference in Quality of Life



## ACTION STEPS

- As with all models of support services, it is best to begin early by having students in high school participate in employment navigation, job shadowing or part-time employment.
- Gather information about the various employment opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities beyond sheltered employment such as customized employment and supported employment.
- “Understand that competitive employment must be the first option for individuals with significant disabilities” ( Wehman, 2006).
- Identify and contact your local One-Stop Career Center using the *Career One Stop* website <http://www.careeronestop.org/PeoplePlaces/PeoplePlaces.aspx>
- Understand the principles of customized employment.
  - “The customized employment process is a flexible blend of strategies, services and supports designed tin increase employment options for job seekers with complex needs through voluntary negotiation of the employment relationship” (p. 23).
- Customized employment begins with the development of an individualized employment plan that identifies the job seekers’ strengths, needs and interests.
- Once the job-seeker’s goals are identified then potential employers are identified and an employment proposal is developed to present to the employer.
- The process then moves into negotiation where the employer and job-seeker develop a business plan that meets all of the participating members’ needs.
- Consider potential funding streams, support services and natural supports that may enhance the customized employment plan.

**Research was conducted through the Tennessee Customized Employment Partnership (TCEP).**

***TCEP is one of a series of national One-Stop Career Centers supported through funds provided by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP).***

- “The results of this study revealed evidence to suggest that the customized employment approach could foster higher levels of self-direction, resulting in improved outcomes and customer satisfaction” (p. 27).

## KEY FINDINGS

- “Quality of life encompasses all aspects of life – social, physical, emotional, and spiritual – in the context of cultural standards as well as individual needs, desires, experiences, and aspirations (as cited in Eggleton, Robertson, Ryan, & Kober, 1999).
  - ◆ Quality of life may be enhanced by participating in activities that optimize individuals’ strengths, interests and capacities.
  - ◆ An adapted version of James Conroy’s *Quality of Life Changes Scale* was used to measure quality of life. Thirteen indicators were rated on a 5-point scale (1= very bad and 5=very good). The quality indicators included: health; running my own life, making choices; getting along with family; getting along with friends; getting out and getting around; what I do all day; speaking up for myself; making decisions; asking for help when I need it; doing my job; getting along with staff; happiness; and working through problems.
- Work is an important element in one’s own perception of quality of life
  - ◆ “Work is a way to establish identity in society, a place with peer groups, and economic independence” (p. 22).
  - ◆ There is sufficient evidence to support the conclusion that individuals with significant disabilities involved in customized employment perceive their quality of life as better than those peers in restricted employment environments (i.e. sheltered employment).
  - ◆ Individuals with significant disabilities are consistently the least likely to be employed.
  - ◆ “Before participation in customized employment, 39.3% of the job seekers had never worked and 50% were not currently working” (p. 23).
- “Customized employment is the voluntary negotiation of a personalized employment relationship between a job seeker and an employer that fulfills the business needs of the employer” (p. 23).
  - ◆ Customized employment is appropriate for job seekers who require accommodations related to tasks, expectations or working conditions.

- ◆ Some families were very well prepared, and others were not. One service provider described how she prepared families: “I have just spent parts of my home visits going over some of that paperwork with the parents and trying to describe the process. And I have just done it a little at a time. You know, there are so many pieces of paper that need to be signed and need to be reviewed.” (p. 286)
- “Participants attained significantly higher ratings of quality of life on 12 of the 13 indicators across Time 1, Time 2, and Time 3” (p. 25). The only element that did not change was *Doing My Job*.

## Related Publications

Conroy, J. W., (2001). *Personal life quality protocol: Generic complete version 4.8*. Narberth, PA: The Center for Outcome Analysis.

Inge, K. J., Banks, P. D., Wehman, P., Hill, J. W., & Shafer, M. S. (1988). Quality of life for individuals who are labeled mentally retarded: Evaluating competitive employment versus sheltered workshop employment. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation*, 23, 97-104.

Wehman, P. (2006). Integrated employment: If not now, when? If not us, who? *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 31(2), 122-126.

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