

Business Connections of VCU



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Program Outcomes Report

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This year we provided services to 43 individuals; 27 who either are or were employed during this time frame. We have continued to incorporate best practices into our approach. These practices include keeping the referral pool to a size that allows us to provide individualized services to our customers, serving individuals who are from underserved disability groups and/or have the most severe disabilities, promoting customer choice and control over service delivery by offering individualized and flexible services.

Many people with disabilities have voiced their concerns that all too frequently decisions for them have been made by professionals who feel that they know best and that self-assertion is often ignored, underestimated, or seen as a “challenging behavior.” The Business Connections staff continues to work hard to ensure that we listen to wishes and desires of the individuals we serve and support them to achieve the job of their choice. Individuals are supported in making decisions and are encouraged to be actively involved in all aspects of service delivery.

We also continue to offer individualized and flexible services. To help ensure this practice, we have attempted to serve one person at a time and maintain a small group of active jobseekers. While no one has been denied access to our service; we purposefully only actively seek referrals on an as needed basis. We believe that a smaller referral pool and our dedication to serving people with the most severe disabilities and/or those who are underserved is in direct alignment with the values associated with supported employment. We also work closely with employers, listen to their needs, and provide services in a way that compliments rather than supplants their existing practices.

As over the past couple of years, this approach continues to present challenges as we strive to receive new referrals in a timely manner and gain the financial support necessary for

service time needed to provide high quality, individualized services. This is particularly true related to offering job development services. Hours are provided on an individual basis however over the past couple of years we oftentimes have only been able to receive 10 hours a month to develop a job for someone.

In the world of job development this amount of time can be expended in a couple of days or few at most. Providers with larger referral pools may be able to keep developing jobs; which sometimes may lead to work for the specific person the hours were authorized for or if not, someone else in the referral pool. It seems that we continue to be caught up in a “catch 22” situation. If we try to keep our pool small and individualize services we have difficulty receiving authorization for the hours necessary to provide ongoing job search services until a position can be developed for a person.

If the pool, is large job seekers may have to wait for longer periods of time. This may be partially due to our use of a holistic approach to supported employment, whereby usually the same job coach provides job development and on the job site training and support services. Over the past year, we have met with vocational rehabilitation counselors about this difficulty and were assured that we could get more than 10 hours for services per month. However, hours were not forthcoming and this practice continued throughout the year. Our answer to this ongoing difficulty has been to try and locate alternate sources of referrals and funding which will be described in more detail.

In addition, we understand that some area vendors have continued to develop contracts with employers and have readily available employment “slots”. We stand by our opinion that this approach is in direct opposition of the major principles associated with the individual placement approach of supported employment.

We continue to work with various counselors with the State Department of Rehabilitative Services to improve our referral system. Employment specialists meet with counselors to introduce themselves and our services. In addition, we continued efforts to get the word out about our services to direct customers and key stakeholders. This was achieved by taking customer marketing information to field offices and making presentations.

Recently, we have been informed that the State will not take any new referrals after mid November. However, reportedly there are over 17,000 people to be served. So we anticipate this should not slow down referrals. With that said, we have witnessed a steady decrease in referrals.

We continued to keep our staff to client ratio small for job development. Again, while we believe that this low ratio will help us assist our customers with locating work in a timely manner, it has been complicated due to a lack in the number of hours authorized for job search services.

Although we use a holistic (employment specialist performs all activities job search, training and follow along) approach, rather than a partitioned approach (employment specialist may market, another may provide on the job support and/or follow along etc...) to service delivery, we continue to ensure each customer receives a primary and secondary coach to assist him or her with job search activities, as needed. If both primary and secondary coaches are unavailable, the program manager or other staff assists with job development, if requested and as possible.

We continue to look for ways to improve upon our process for evaluating the satisfaction of services from other key stakeholders (i.e., employer, funders, referral sources, and family members). The results of our latest efforts are provided later in the report.

Here are some highlights of what we accomplished this year; more details are offered in other sections of this report. All persons served have a severe disability as evidenced by referral

documentation and/or receipt of social security benefits. Many of those served have secondary and tertiary labels as well.

Similar to last year, the majority or 58% of those served were male and 42% were females. The majority of 44% (55% the previous year) were Caucasian/white, while the remainder of individuals served or 56% (45% the previous year) were African American/black. This illustrates about a 10% increase in serving individuals who are black, opposed to last years percentages.

Eleven individuals were referred for services during the year. This is about half of what was referred (21 people) the previous year. We feel like some of this to budgetary constraints of the funding agency. Twenty seven people are still or were employed during the year in a wide variety of occupations. We continued to customize or create jobs. The majority of individuals worked part-time. Everyone was paid minimum wage or more.

At the close of the year 20 individuals remained employed. About 40% of the pool was discharged from the program during the year for a variety of reasons. Including unable to contact, DRS would no longer supported service delivery, customer no longer desired supported employment services.

The previous 2006-2007 Program Outcomes Report made a number of recommendations to enhance & improve services. Below is a brief summary of how these have been addressed to date.

First, we continued to look for ways to improve communication with rehabilitation counselors. A policy was established requiring employment specialists to contact vocational rehabilitation counselors on an ongoing basis to provide a verbal update on current status. They are also required to use a new procedure for requesting hours. This involves contact by

telephone, follow up with an e-mail and completion of a formal form used to request hours. If hours are not approved within a couple of days the program manger is to be notified and she follows up. There has been improvement in this area, but more is needed. Management will continue to monitor staff understanding of and adherence to this policy.

This past year there continued to be differences of opinion between staff and some rehabilitation counselors about what measures should be used to signal a change from the provision of on the job site training to stabilization and long term support or follow along services. The program manager attended meetings with the State Supported Employment Coordinator to receive more information and guidance on this issue. Some new staff also attended an in-service with the State about supported employment services which also reviewed this matter.

Despite these efforts difficulties continue related to the determination of stabilization with some vocational rehabilitation counselors. In some instances, we were told to move someone to stabilization even when we disagreed and our data and reports from the consumer and/or employer indicated otherwise. We will continue to educate staff and as needed consult with vocational rehabilitation counselors to help ensure we are following established guidelines. We also recommended DRS counselors receive training on this topic too.

To improve communication between all parties we encouraged DRS counselors to visit the job site prior to the worker going in to follow along status. However, this has not occurred to date. We still feel it is a good idea and will continue to encourage this practice.

We reached out to organizations, and schools to promote youth going to work prior to leaving the school system. For example, a meeting has been held with the Hanover Association for Retarded Citizens (ARC) to discuss ways to serve youth with severe disabilities that will

soon be leaving or have recently left school. To date, family members, associated with the Hanover ARC have been encouraged to contact the Program Director to learn more about possible services. In addition, there are talks about setting up an educational night next year to help parents and their sons and daughters better understand supported employment and their rights as consumers of this service.

We continue to seek the referral of individuals with Autism, an underserved group. We have been in close contact with Faison School to develop a relationship. This has moved forward at the RRTC training division is assisting them with establishing a community based vocational education program. However, efforts to get students who are in their last year of school referred to the vendorship for supported employment have been slow. Some individuals referred were not financially eligible for the service. Our goal is to continue to meet with representatives from the school, students and family members to promote referrals to services.

We have also been pursuing a vendorship with the Medicaid Waiver MRDD program. An application was submitted this past spring. We anticipate that we will be able to begin offering Supported Employment Services under the waiver this fall.

We are now serving veterans and have established a partnership with McGuire Veterans Hospital. We have a contract in place to serve this new population. We have also been working with the State vocational rehabilitation counselor and the in-house vocational rehabilitation staff to coordinate services, in a way that best serves veterans. The annual contract was put in place this summer. We hope this will provide a springboard for future work as we strive to establish an hourly fee for service or future contracts for services.

To date we have primarily served veterans who reside across the state. Many of these individuals have been unemployed for long periods of time. Our goal is to move towards serving

military personnel (those returning from Iraq), particularly those who are seen in the recently established transitional living/vocational program. The goal is assist them with return to work for the government or in their community. Because many of these individuals live out of the area, advocacy and consultation will be provided. Serving military personnel will be a major focus for us during the months to come. We are in regular talks with the physicians of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation to develop this program which serves poly trauma, traumatic brain injury and spinal cord injury patients.

We promoted our situational assessment services this past year. However, to date we have still not established a solid referral network within the schools. Again, we will continue to work on this over the next year.

We continued to seek ways to improve our timeliness of service delivery. We feel hindered by not receiving hours needed to provide ongoing job development. Regardless, we remain conscientious of a need to try and improve in this area, including looking at alternate ways to bill for this activity.

We continued to use a “team” approach and keep our referral pool small. Even with this strategy in place, we still found it challenging to provide ongoing job development due to a number of reasons including, but not limited to, few monthly hours allotted for this service by funding agency, and restraints by staffing patterns.

We learned about a working interview that some programs are using to secure employment. It seems this approach may work for individuals with less significant disabilities but it still not clear on how this may benefit individuals with server disabilities who are using supported employment. We plan to revisit this idea and decide upon its utility. It may be useful

for individuals served with less significant disabilities and/or support needs; those who need time-limited not supported employment services.

We continued our contract to provide telework assessments for CORA an organization that offers training and placement in to telework services. We will continue to promote telework as an employment option.

We reviewed the quality indicators, and data base to determine if any elements need to be added or deleted. Personnel were trained to enter data in to the base on a monthly basis.

II. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The Program Outcomes Report reviews our effectiveness (i.e., were those served involved in making decisions and job selection; were jobs developed representative of local labor market; were jobs carved to meet needs of employers and specific talents of those served, how many people went to work for minimum wage or better in community based jobs and how long were individuals successfully employed); efficiency or how quickly we initiated services and service satisfaction among those who received direct services.

An annual review allows us to share our success with our customers, stakeholders and employers. It also provides us with insight on areas in need of improvement and assists us in the development and implementation of an action plan which should help us progress in many ways.

III. BACKGROUND ABOUT ORGANIZATION AND SERVICE BEING EVALUATED

A. ORGANIZATIONAL DESCRIPTION/HISTORY

Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) is located on two downtown campuses in the heart of Richmond, Virginia. With a metropolitan population of more than 1.25 million people, Richmond is a growing community. The central location of the university enables smooth functioning of grant activities and facilitates collaboration. For example, the Virginia Spinal

Cord Injury Council Association and the Virginia State Department of Rehabilitative Services offices are located within 2 miles.

VCU ranks among the top 100 universities in the country in sponsored research and enrolls nearly 30,000 students in 187 certificate, undergraduate, graduate, professional and doctoral programs in 15 schools and one liberal arts college. MCV Hospitals, clinics and the health sciences schools of Virginia Commonwealth University constitute the VCU Medical Center, one of the leading academic medical centers in the country.

VCU is the third-largest research university in Virginia. Each year an increasing amount of external research funds have been awarded. In the past year, VCU received 206 million dollars in research awards.

The current Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) on Workplace Supports and Job Retention were established in 1998 and are led by Dr. Paul Wehman. In previous years, he directed the RRTC on Supported Employment. The focus of this RRTC was on advancing the concept of supported employment for individuals with mental retardation. Over the years, the center has focused on using this approach with underserved disability populations like people with severe physical disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, and mental illness. With a clinical research emphasis, the center has examined and successfully developed a variety of methods to help persons with disabilities gain and maintain employment.

Development of vocational rehabilitation methods has reflected a commitment to provide competitive work in non-segregated environments. Emphasis has also been placed person centered and customer directed services, family involvement and networking with community rehabilitation agencies, like the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS).

Under the direction of Dr. Wehman, the VCU-RRTC has advanced the concept of supported employment for persons with all types of severe disabilities through its demonstration projects, vendor ship activities, research, training activities, and publications. Largely as a result of these efforts, supported employment is now a service option for vocational rehabilitation consumers nationwide; today nearly 110,000 individuals with severe disabilities have access to jobs.

In the late eighties, the RRTC entered into a contract with DRS to become an Employment Service Organization (ESO). Today ESO, known as Business Connections operates out of the center's Employment Services division and serves the Richmond, Fredericksburg and surrounding counties area. While the program is open to anyone who meets the eligibility criteria we continue to serve individuals who might not otherwise receive employment assistance. In addition, we continue to expand our knowledge and share this with other professionals. Business Connections is staffed by a program director, program manager and four employment specialists. In 2001 and again in 2004 and 2007 the program received three year CARF accreditation.

Throughout the years the VCU RRTC has been heavily involved in the development and formulation of disability employment research. Today, the center RRTC on Workplace Supports provides research and training related to identifying factors in the workplace that inhibit or enhance the employment rate and career advancement of people with disabilities. Over 195 journal articles and 115 commercially produced texts or book chapters were published and co-written by RRTC staff since 1988. Live web casts and distance education courses are also provided. In the past two years, 48 web casts were aired. Attendance in these session was a total of 2,300 for 2007 and 2,700 this year. Today, over 2,400 people have participated in the

Supported Employment Web Based Certificate Program and the Supported Competitive Employment for Individuals with Mental Illness courses.

B. PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

i. Problem Statement

The number of people participating in supported employment in the U.S. has increased within a decade from less than 9,800 to over 140,000 (Wehman, Revell, Kregel, 1998). While we can deduce that these numbers have grown in subsequent years, there is no national tracking data for individuals in supported employment today. Customized employment strategies such as supported employment, supported entrepreneurship, coworker supports, job restructuring, workplace accommodations, and federal legislation facilitated the integrated employment outcomes for these individuals. In addition, policy shifts have enabled expanded opportunities for integrated employment.

In 2001, the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) amended its regulations governing state vocational rehabilitation programs to redefine the term “employment outcome” to mean “an individual with a disability working in an integrated setting” (Federal Register, January 22, 2001). For decades, extended employment (formerly sheltered employment) was an acceptable outcome for individuals receiving VR services. The new definition removes this type of employment as an approved outcome, because extended/sheltered employment uses non-integrated work settings.

The purpose of the VR program as stated in The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, is to enable individuals with a disability to achieve employment in an integrated setting (Federal Register, January 22, 2001). In response to this priority, first highlighted in the 1992 Amendments, the 1990s was marked by a decline in sheltered workshop placements. Nationally

in FY90, VR agencies closed 11,605 sheltered workshops. In FY98, the number of sheltered workshop closures dropped 34%. In contrast, the number of individuals closed in integrated work settings, rose steadily during the 1990s. VR closed approximately 9,528 individuals in supported employment in FY91, 13,950 individuals in FY94, and 23,056 individuals in FY98 (Gilmore and Butterworth, 2001). Unfortunately, Gilmore & Butterworth (2001) found in the same time period that the number of individuals entering non-integrated employment (including facility-based and non-work) also greatly expanded. Despite the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other federal initiatives, competitive employment still is not the first choice for the majority of individuals with disabilities (Wehman, Revell, & Brooke, 2002).

Competitive employment remains an elusive goal for the vast majority of people with disabilities despite evidence of increased earning and satisfaction from the work experience. “Negative stereotyping, unemployment, underemployment, and placement in segregated work and non-work settings are likely to continue until there are systemic changes undertaken. One such change is increasing provider capacity to provide individually determined, customized employment in non-stereotypic jobs for persons with disabilities” (Federal Register, August 5, 2002).

ii. Overall goals

Through our ongoing efforts and collaboration with individuals with significant disabilities, DRS and other stakeholders, the program continues to provide a valuable demonstration of how community based competitive employment can become a reality for all Americans who desire to work.

First, the program strives to support persons with disabilities with identifying their abilities, possible support needs; conducting a job search to locate real work for real pay,

providing and facilitating workplace supports as needed, and ongoing long term follow along and job retention services both at or away from the work place.

Second, the program offers a valuable service to the business community. These services include: assisting employers with identifying hiring needs or new work structures, referring candidates for interviews, providing initial and ongoing on the jobsite support services to ensure the employer's business requirements are being met by the new hire, and providing education and technical assistance on disability and employment related issues.

iii. Outcomes and performance measures

Program outcomes and performance measures are observable and measurable milestones toward an outcome target. Indicators include; days from referral to service initiation, severity of disability, customer involvement in service delivery and job selection, types of businesses where people work, type of occupations, amount of pay received, type of creative work structures, job retention or days employed, reasons for job separation, and reports of satisfaction with services.

iv. Program activities

The following section describes persons served, eligibility criteria, and scope of services offered by Business Connections.

a. *Persons Served*

Our *Supported Employment Services* are designed to meet the needs of individuals with severe disabilities. This includes people for whom competitive employment has not traditionally occurred, individuals whose competitive employment has been interrupted or intermittent as a result of a severe disability, and those who, because of their disability, need ongoing support to maintain competitive employment.

The program also offers *Time Limited Job Coach Training Services* that are available for people with disabilities who require assistance with locating employment, transitioning into the workforce, and/or time limited on-the-job skills training and support services. The aforementioned ongoing or long-term support services are not provided in this service option.

Vocational Assessments are available within the context of implementing either Supported Employment or Time Limited Services or for general career exploration.

b. Admission Criteria

- Persons must have a severe disability. Time Limited/Job Coach Training Services are available for people who need or desire less intensive services. Situational vocational assessments are available to participants in both services for those who desire general career exploration.
- Persons served should be willing to work within the City of Richmond and the surrounding counties (i.e., Henrico, Chesterfield, Hanover) or the Fredericksburg and surrounding counties. Persons who reside outside this radius are accepted for services if funding is made available. Whenever the person is referred from outside of the general catchments area, the program strongly encourages the referring counselor to also become involved in job placement activities in order to reduce service cost.
- Usually individuals are not employed at the time of referral; however, there are exceptions. Examples of when someone who is already employed may be referred for services include: the person is experiencing difficulties at work and intervention may alleviate the problems and increase longevity on the job, the person is underemployed and desires new employment, or the person will be laid off from work.

c. Scope of Services Available

What follows is a general description of how services are delivered for the supported employment and time limited services. The primary services are *customer assessment, career search and job selection, on and off the job vocational supports, and long-term retention.*

c1. Customer Assessment

During Customer Assessment, the employment specialist formulates an understanding of what the customer wants from an employment opportunity, as well as what she/he feels they have to offer to the business community. Everyone has a variety of unique experiences and abilities that can translate into valuable services to the business community. The assessment process helps distinguish the business needs a person can meet given their current skills, abilities and total life experiences. Our employment specialists are required to meet new customers in their home or other place of their choosing, within 5 working days of receiving the referral to begin this process.

What someone wants to do can be a difficult question? The customer needs to know what she/he is good at, what she/he is not so good at, what she/he likes to do, and what is important to him or her. Without consideration to these factors, the job search will lack focus and the person may end up being “placed” into a job. We also believe the only way our employment specialists can initially represent their customers to employers is to believe in and know each person’s abilities and interests.

One of our first steps to get to know our customers involves conducting functional assessment activities. This may include interviews, observations, and other informational gathering activities aimed at capturing a picture of who the individual really is and what his or her interests, skills, and desires are. This component of supported employment focuses on using person centered planning to learn more about the individual, as well as give the jobseeker an

opportunity to assess him or herself. This lays the foundation that guides the job search, on the jobsite training, and support and long term support.

Our two primary methods of functional assessment involve having the customer observe work in business settings and other community environments. In this way, an individual can indicate what he or she likes by visiting or participating in the actual environments where the events occur. This allows someone to express preferences that may not be communicated, exhibit abilities that may go undetected, and make choices from experiences that might not otherwise ever be known.

A community assessment provides an excellent opportunity to become familiar with the local area where the individual lives both to identify potential support resources and to determine job preferences. Additionally, it allows the employment specialist the chance to identify businesses to target for job development. For customers who have never worked or who have had limited experiences, making choices about a job or the features of a workplace often can be difficult. Using this approach, the employment specialist and customer spend time in a select community setting.

c1a. Vocational Assessment

A situational assessment provides a customer with the opportunity to perform job tasks in real work environments in the community. Usually, a situational assessment is conducted for a four hour period in two to three different types of jobs in the community which are representative of the local labor market. However, a general guideline for the length of an assessment is that it should reflect the customer's future work day. If the individual wants to work full time, then he or she should participate in assessments that reflect a full day of work.

Any business can be a potential site; identified from any number of experiences, contacts, or resources that the employment specialist is aware of (e.g., past employment, personal contacts, job development, previous supported employment setting, newspaper, telephone book, and so forth). However, the sites selected for any specific customer depends on the choices of the individual.

If the customer is unable to identify specific ideas about a career path, then situational assessments can be even more valuable to the individual and the employment specialist. A variety of job types should be explored, and the customer's reaction to each recorded to compare which may be the most appropriate and most preferred job choice. It is important to note that it is not necessarily assumed that a customer will choose to work in one of the types of businesses where the situational assessments are conducted, but an opportunity is provided to assist the customer with determining the career goal, work environment, job characteristics, or business that he or she might like.

Situational assessments are useful in determining the type of employment services a customer can benefit from and the level and intensity of supports she or he will need. Observing an individual performing real work in multiple environments provides an indication of her or his work characteristics, interests, skills, abilities, learning style, and support needs. In addition, a situational assessment offers the individual an opportunity to witness different types of jobs and their requirements first-hand to assist him or her with making a job choice.

Persons who are returning to pre-disability employment may desire Information related to their ability to perform the essential functions of the job with or without accommodation and whether this person can perform the job without posing a direct threat to the health or safety of

the person or others is provided. The assessment activities are customized to the situation at hand and generally take place in the actual work setting.

Some customers may desire to have their existing skills and knowledge as they return to previous employment or education assessed (i.e., hair stylist, nurse, shoe repairman, etc.). In such cases, a vocational skills and knowledge assessment site is developed and a consultant (person with the experience required) is hired to report on current skill level functioning. The focus here is to examine acquired skills that can be used in new employment settings as well as identifies potential accommodations.

c1b. Customer Profile

One of the challenges of the assessment process is pulling together all of the information which has been obtained from a variety of sources. It is not uncommon for different information gathering techniques to yield differing information about the same thing. While this can be confusing, it is extremely helpful to be able to paint a larger picture of who the customer is.

Once all of the assessment activities have been completed, the employment specialist should have a general sense of who the customer is what kind of jobs he or she would like, and the types of supports that may be needed. The information is summarized and a customer profile is created.

A Business Analysis described later includes parallel items that focus on the business setting and job requirements. This can be used to assist customers with making choices about job selection, training, and support needs.

We believe that assessment should never be a lengthy process. Whenever the following are noted, we move on to assist the person with his or her job search.

- Customer assets (skills and interests),

- Customer personal experiences (in terms of work, education and other activities),
- Customer work values or rewards expected,
- Customer work setting she/he will consider,
- Customer and employment specialist associate how the above relate to career choice, and
- Customer's participation in job search.

c2. Customer Career Search and Job Selection

Once the customer considers important aspects of employment and what he or she has to offer businesses are determined, strategies to present and sell his/her unique skills and talents to the business community are developed. Conducting a successful job search is not a simple process. Due to the continuously changing and competitive nature of the job market, there are no guarantees that any particular job search strategy will work. Therefore, a diverse approach is used. For example; we may brainstorm a list of prospective businesses where the customer wants to work, survey the customer's personal network, identify job leads and referral services, and contact former employers and businesses advertising employment opportunities.

Personal business networks are also developed. In this procedure, the customer lists names of individuals to contact about employment opportunities. The network may include family, friends, family members of friends, church members, support group members, people they do business with, etc. For each person reached an inquiry about the names of new contacts if requested. This leads to the development of a network referral chain.

Job lead and referral services are also used to identify jobs. These services include job banks, telephone job information lines and professional networks. If the customer worked in the past, whether paid or volunteer, we may contact former supervisors and coworkers to inquire about leads too.

We sometimes use current employment leads. Sources of information include newspapers, government listings (federal, state, city, and county), help wanted signs or announcements posted on public bulletin boards, etc. We also focus heavily on the “hidden job market” or jobs that do not currently exist or are not being advertised. Studies have shown that only a small percentage of jobs available are advertised and employers are more likely to hire someone they know. Therefore, a major thrust of job development efforts is to become known or acquainted with an employer. Thus, our initial contact focuses on offering services and building rapport with the employer without immediately wanting something in return. During our initial interview with a prospective employer we seek to obtain key pieces of information about the company and, if applicable, specific job openings. This information is documented on a Business Analysis.

After we receive information concerning an employer’s hiring needs, if possible, we observe someone performing various jobs. We make observations on the various tasks performed, essential job functions, critical skills needed related to each job duty, and approximate time spent engaged in each job task, etc.

This process, gives us a better understanding of the employer’s expectations. This information is also recorded on the Business Analysis. The analysis along with additional notes, employer job descriptions, etc., provides a permanent record of both specific job requirements and general work characteristics of the worksite. Later, this data is used to guide our customers with making a decision on whether or not to interview for a particular job.

Some of our customers are not qualified or cannot perform essential functions of existing jobs. Thus, we sometimes negotiate or restructure a job with a willing employer. Job restructuring involves redistribution of job tasks that cannot be performed by the jobseeker.

These tasks are given to a co-worker in exchange for a task that the job seeker can do. In other instances a new job may be created or carved.

Job restructuring or carving are excellent strategies to use with a job seeker who may not be necessarily “qualified” or able to perform all aspects of a current job opening. Job restructuring ideas may not be obvious. The employment specialist must spend time working with the business to determine the potential or undiscovered need. Some of the best ideas for job restructuring have resulted from our informal observations and conversations with decision makers about their needs and how they do business.

c2a. Directing the Job-Hunt

Our customers may choose to lead, direct, actively participate, or simply stay informed during the job development or job search process. The key to providing a customer-driven approach is to work with our customers to assist them in determining their role, duties, and responsibilities. Job seekers are encouraged and supported to be actively involved in this process. There are a variety of different ways for our customers to participate in the job development process like: creating a resume, telephoning the employment specialist with job leads, cold calling employers, and networking with family and friends. Regardless of how the customer shapes his or her role, the employment specialist continues to actively contact employers on the person’s behalf.

c2b. Application Process and Interviewing

If a job opportunity is available, we contact the customer. If interested, he or she completes the business’ employment application. The employment specialist provides support as needed.

Some job seekers may desire preparation for an interview to help alleviate anxiety. If so, the customer and the employment specialist meet before the interview to discuss:

- The purpose of the interview;
- How they will get to and from the interview;
- What the employer will want to know;
- How to present the customer's experience and qualifications;
- What the applicant will want to ask; and
- How to present a business-like image.

In some situations, the applicant and/or the employer may prefer that the interview be attended by the applicant only. In other situations, the applicant and/or the employer may allow the employment specialist to participate.

c2c. Review Offer

Prior to the interview and again after, employment is offered, the pros and cons of the particular employment situation are reviewed with the customer. This information is based upon a comparison of the "Customer Profile" information and data collected during the "Business/Job Analysis." This helps determine whether or not the employment offer fulfills the customer's desires, capitalizes on vocational strengths, and what types of workplace support and accommodations may be necessary.

At the point in time when an employer makes an offer of employment to a customer, he or she must make a decision on whether or not to accept it. The employment specialist assists the customer with this process. The decision is based on an analysis of facts, knowledge, and data collected regarding the business and the specific job/career and/or occupational preferences and abilities of the customer. In essence, the task once more is to identify the pros and cons

related to accepting or rejecting the position. The customer, with the support of the employment specialist, makes the decision about whether or not to accept or reject an employer's offer.

c2d. Before the First Day of Work

There are several activities that may need to be coordinated by the employment specialist prior to a customer's first day of work. It is imperative that the employment specialist notify the vocational rehabilitation counselor and significant others (if applicable), make sure arrangements are made for transportation or transportation training, and, if appropriate, tax credit is completed and signed by the employer. Examples of other activities that may need to be completed include: referral to Social Security for reporting procedures, and assistance with the purchase of uniforms or other work related items, etc.

c3. On and Off the Job Vocational Supports

Once employed, the employment specialist provides support on and sometimes off the jobsite. Supports are provided to assist the new hire with learning how to do the job effectively and safely, communicating with jobsite personnel, handling issues outside of work, such as accessing transportation systems, depositing paychecks, etc.

The employment specialist is prepared to take on the role as a facilitator of independent, self-directed learning and/or a job skills training specialist. Also, depending upon the job, while the customer is getting up to speed, the employment specialist may actually perform some of the work. This insurance to complete the work keeps the employer satisfied and gives the customer additional time necessary to learn the job. Examples of supports follow.

Systematic instruction is one method of teaching job duties and job related tasks in a consistent manner. The use of systematic instruction also provides a method of data collection regarding the person's performance level. Using this information to monitor progress during

training will provide structure and minimize confusion for the trainee, as well as the employment specialist. Production training involves determining production standards for the job duty, and the individual's current rate of performance. A comparison reveals if there is a need to increase productivity.

The implementation of compensatory strategies, adaptations, in addition to restructuring the work environment, can be extremely useful in enhancing the new employee's learning and promoting his or her ability to perform the job. Adjustments can be cognitively-oriented, providing the individual with effective ways to remember what to do and how to do it. For example:

- A worksheet outlining the steps needed to balance a cash drawer
- A map that outlines a route to follow when cleaning apartment grounds
- Written detailed instructions to follow when cleaning plants

Other implementations may be used to compensate for physical deficits. For example:

- Providing a lap board for individuals involved in data entry to reduce ataxia
- Use of a stand to reduce unsteadiness in upright positions while sorting mail

Development and implementation of strategies usually occurs when an individual encounters difficulty in learning a new task, shows great variability in task performance, or is unable to meet the required production standard. A review of probe data reveals where difficulties arise. It is crucial that the user perceive the usefulness of an accommodation.

Therefore, the new employee is always involved in the planning and implementation process.

Some new hires require less assistance with learning how to do the job, but more support related to interpersonal relations, specifically, communicating and working effectively with jobsite personnel. The employment specialist is available to help in this area too.

Sometimes, going to work and learning a new task can be very challenging. The inability to see immediate success can lead to frustration. Frustration appears in many ways, such as verbal outbursts, throwing things, or even threats to quit a job. If this arises, the employment specialist is there to assist by teaching techniques to keep the outward signs of frustration at a minimum and manage these feelings. Other customers may exhibit unusual behaviors. Whenever present, the employment specialist may educate jobsite personnel and in some instances, implement a behavioral program under the supervision of the Program Director.

Understandably, an employer will only tolerate unusual or rude behaviors for a limited amount of time. Therefore, we feel it is important to immediately identify such issues and begin to try to reduce occurrences.

c3a. Obtain Performance Feedback

In addition to the new hires supervisor, the employment specialist also provides feedback to the customer on how he or she is progressing toward reaching the employer's desired performance standards. Generally, data is collected on what has been learned and productivity. These findings help to determine the effectiveness of our training. The customer is also encouraged to solicit performance feedback from the employer. All of the aforementioned is useful when determining a fading schedule.

Eventually, the employee is performing the job to the employer's standard and the employment specialist begins to fade from the jobsite. This is a gradual process whereby the employment specialist spends less and less time on the jobsite, until eventually he or she is no longer present on the job.

c4. Customized Job Retention Services

Supported Employment, offers ongoing support for as long as the individual is employed. As a matter of fact, this feature distinguishes it from other service options. It's important for the customer to learn to perform the job well. It's also crucial to keep it. A multitude of factors can influence the reliability of ongoing supports, such as a change in management or the way a job function is performed, the customer's transportation or residential situation. Therefore, it is critical to keep abreast of how things are going both at and away from work. In Supported Employment, follow-up services are available throughout the duration of employment. During this phase, the employment specialist is no longer at the worksite on a daily basis, but continues to have ongoing customer and employer contact and is available to provide additional support services, as needed.

To ensure that employment is stable, the employment specialist gathers information on how the customer is performing at work. This may relate to:

- current job performance,
- the employer's perceptions of performance,
- effectiveness of accommodations,
- relations with jobsite personnel,
- job satisfaction, and
- factors outside of work that may affect job performance.

Data is collected by making observations and communicating with knowledgeable work site personnel. Additional assistance is provided as indicated by the employer or customer.

c4a. Time Limited Services

This service is like Supported Employment, except on the jobsite training and long term support services are time limited. Once the employment specialist fades, follow up is limited.

Persons who participate in this service are not in need of ongoing long-term follow along support services.

v. Staffing

During the year, the program was staffed by 4 employment specialists. Staff members have college educations, and one has more than five years experience in Supported Employment. Three employment specialists were hired this year. Each new staff member received in house training, enrollment in the Supported Employment Web Course, select readings, and on the job skills training. The Program Manager has a degree in Communications and nine years experience in Supported Employment. She is responsible for marketing activities, staff supervision, and some direct services. The Program Director has a Master's Degree in Education and twenty one years experience in Supported Employment. She oversees the overall program operations.

The current customer to staff ratio for job search services did not exceed one to four. During jobsite training, the ratio is one to one. The ratio for follow-along fluctuates depending on the number of customers working during a particular time period and number of staff.

IV. OVERALL EVALUATION GOALS

The questions answered by the evaluation are as follows:

1. Are we serving individuals with the most severe disabilities?
2. Do we serve a diverse group of people reflective of the community at large?
3. Do individuals have home/first visit scheduled within five days of initial referral from DRS?
4. Do our customers receive at least minimum wage or better for work performed?
5. Do our customers work part-time or more hours if preferred?

6. Do our customers perform “real work” in community based businesses?
7. Are our customers involved in their job searches and job selection?
8. Does our staff attempt to partner and educate businesses by offering educational materials and technical assistance; rather than only “asking for something?”
9. Does our staff work with businesses to restructure job opportunities to meet the needs of both the jobseeker and business?
10. Do our customers receive individualized on and off the job vocational support?
11. Why do our customers leave employment?
12. Are the individuals that are served, satisfied with services?
13. Are customer complaints handled within a timely manner?

V. METHODOLOGY

Program outcomes reports were compiled by and reviewed by the program manager. This information is entered in to a data base and updated on a regular basis. It includes basic demographics and customer status, for example if employed, date of hire, employer and occupation etc... If separated from work length of employment and reason for separation. It also includes reason for leaving or being discharged from the program. In addition, to using the data base a random sample of customer files were reviewed. This included an examination of the following types of information to gain insight into customer involvement, individualization of service delivery, and use of workplace supports.

Customer Assessment activities are documented by case notes. These include a description of the activities provided and the outcome of each, for instance, home visit, intake interview, resume development, and a customer profile. This includes, but is not limited to the documenting individuals’ interests and abilities, work preferences, and the type and level of on

and off the job site support needs. Daily service time is also documented for this and all other activities. *Job Search and Selection* activities are documented using the employer contact logs and case notes. The log includes the name and type of business approached, strategy used for making the connection, and the outcomes of the employer contacts is documented. *On and off the job vocational* support activities are documented using training data and case notes.

Information generally includes: identification of tasks being trained, description of adaptations to the worksite, current strengths and/or concerns, and degree of worker independence. *Job Retention Services* are also documented using case notes. Ongoing supports include on and off the job site visits or contacts to document the employee's status and/or provide additional skills training or arrange supports as needed.

In the past, we randomly surveyed individuals who received our services to measure their level of satisfaction. The database manager contacted individuals by telephone, mail, and email. Due to poor response rates we are measuring satisfaction in other ways which will be further explained in the following section.

VI. INTERPRETATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Goal 1:

Are we serving individuals with the most severe disabilities?

Business Connections served a total of 43 individuals this year. A few people were referred for situational assessment only. However, the majority of individuals referred received Supported Employment Services.

All persons served have a severe disability as evidenced by referral documentation and/or receipt of social security benefits. Approximately 30 percent of those served had a primary disability label of Mental Retardation, followed by those with cerebral palsy at approximately 12

percent. Table 1 provides a complete break out of individuals served according to primary disability label. Many of those served have secondary and tertiary labels as well. This data reflects the fact that Business Connections is dedicated to serving those individuals with the most significant disabilities and underserved populations.

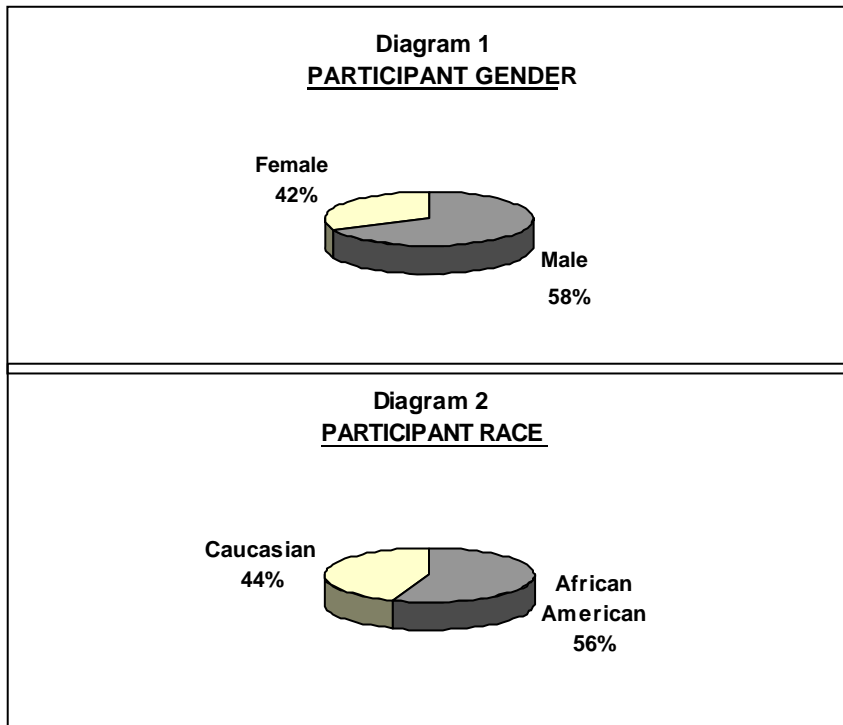
Table 1
INDIVIDUALS SERVED ACCORDING TO PRIMARY DISABILITY LABEL (N=43)

| DISABILITY LABEL | FREQUENCY |
|---------------------------|-----------|
| Mental Illness | 4 |
| Traumatic Brain Injury | 4 |
| Cerebral Palsy | 5 |
| Acquired Brain Injury | 1 |
| Mental Retardation | 13 |
| Spinal Cord Injury | 3 |
| Autism | 4 |
| Down Syndrome | 0 |
| Hearing Impaired | 2 |
| Epilepsy/Seizure Disorder | 0 |
| Visually Impaired | 2 |
| Learning Disability | 5 |
| TOTAL | 43 |

Goal 2:

Do we serve a diverse group of people reflective of the community at large?

The majority or 58% of those served were male, and 42% were female. Forty four 44% percent of individuals served were Caucasian/White and 56% were African American/Black. Diagram 1 and 2 below illustrate the basic demographics of the persons served throughout the year.



Goals 3 through 6:

Do individuals have home/first visit scheduled within five days of initial referral from DRS?

Do our customers receive at least minimum wage or better for work performed?

Do our customers work part-time or more hours if preferred?

Do our customers perform “real work” in community based businesses?

At the start of the year, 15 individuals were employed and receiving long term follow along services and 17 were receiving situational assessment or job development services. Over the course of the year, 11 additional individuals were referred for services. All except two individuals referred for services met with an employment specialist within five days of referral from the State Department of Vocational Rehabilitative Services.

During the year, twelve (12) individuals went to work in twelve jobs. Two individuals were terminated during the year. Another person received additional on the job site training

services due to changes on the job. During the year 27 people worked in paid employment. The majority worked part-time or less than 30 hours a week.

Table 2 below provides a break down of the type of industries where individuals were employed throughout the year. The data indicates that Business Connections is dedicated to work with an array of employers in the local business community.

| INDUSTRY | FREQUENCY |
|--|------------------|
| Retail | 4 |
| Food – Restaurant (3); Cafeteria (2); Fast food (2) | 7 |
| Office/Clerical | 3 |
| Recreational/Fitness | 2 |
| Hospitality | 3 |
| University | 3 |
| Production worker | 3 |
| Other - Lawn care, Kennel assistant | 2 |
| TOTAL | 27 |

Goal 7:

Are our customers involved in their job searches and job selection?

Those individuals who went to work and/or continued employment during the year worked in a wide variety of occupations as shown in Table 3 below. This along with case file information illustrates the fact that the abilities and interests of those served are reflected in their job selection.

| |
|--|
| Retail – sales associates, security guard |
| Food – kitchen staff member, delivery person, customer service associate, line worker |
| Office/Clerical - data entry specialist, marketing assistant |
| Hospitality - steward |
| University – bookstore associate |
| Production – assembly line worker |
| Other - lawn care helper, golf course attendant |

Goal 8:

Does our staff attempt to partner and educate businesses by offering educational materials and technical assistance; rather than only “asking for something?”

Our staff used a variety of approaches to make contacts with employers. Their initial approach included offering services rather than simply asking about job opportunities. Job development activities focused on creating relations and developing rapport with potential employers. Appendix B provides examples of materials offered to businesses.

Goal 9:

Does the staff work with businesses to restructure job opportunities to meet the needs of both the job seeker and business?

Among those working, seven of these positions were significantly restructured or carved out to meet the needs of an employer and specific talents of a particular jobseeker. Table 4 below provides a listing of job titles and primary functions of the created job

| Table 4 Examples of Jobs Carved |
|--|
| Retail Associate Stocks merchandise, cleans, removes trash, dismantles displays, straightens products on shelf, prices items, creates product displays |
| Office Assistant Inputs customer database into computer Sends out e-mails to potential buyers/customers Sends and receives product orders Tests and assembles merchandise |
| Restaurant Cleaner Vacuums floor, resets tables, various cleaning tasks |
| Buffet Manger Keep buffet stocked with food |

Goal 10:

Do our customers receive individualized on and off the job vocational supports?

A review of files revealed a variety of vocational supports were used to assist individuals with learning how to perform the job and maintain employment. This included the use of one to one skills training, design and implementation of assistive technology, and compensatory strategies and facilitation of natural supports to name a few. The case study offered in Appendix C further illustrates the use of workplace supports for one of our customers.

Goal 11:

Why do our customers separate from employment?

During the year, 7 individuals separated from employment. Six people left their jobs voluntarily, whereas 1 left for involuntary reasons. Table 5 below indicates the primary reason for voluntary and involuntary separations.

| Table 5 Primary Cause of Separation from Employment (N=7) | |
|--|------------------|
| <i>Worker Initiated (Voluntary)</i> | |
| Separation Reason | Frequency |
| Moved out of area, went to school | 1 |
| Hours reduced at job, desired new employment | 3 |
| Hours reduced at work, stopped coming to work | 2 |
| <i>Forced Resignation (Involuntary)</i> | |
| Separation Reason | Frequency |
| Inability to meet employer's expectations | 1 |
| | |

Goal 12:

Are the individuals that are served, satisfied with services?

Fifteen individuals exited the program. The primary reason associated with each person leaving the program is provided in Table 6 below.

| Table 6 Primary Cause of Discharge from Program (N= 15) | |
|--|------------------|
| Reason | Frequency |
| Unable to contact | 2 |
| DRS would no longer supported service delivery, felt person not employable, taking too long to find job etc... | 2 |
| Time limited service; situational assessment | 2 |
| Employed/ customer no longer desired SE support | 2 |
| Employed at time of discharge, desired new service provider for follow along or initiate new job search | 1 |
| Obtained employment/Did not want SE | 2 |
| Found temp job | 1 |
| Customer requested new service provider | 2 |
| DRS did not think person needed SE | 1 |

In the past we have attempted to contact customers (individuals with disabilities, employers and vocational rehabilitation counselors) about satisfaction with services using surveys by phone, email, and mail. Due to an ongoing poor response rate over the years we have decided to find other ways to get at this most important information. How we plan to address this is presented under the recommendations section of this report. This year we continued to review employment retention rates and reasons for separation and discharge from the program to help us understand satisfaction with services among the individuals with disabilities we have served.

This year no one separated from employment due to a dislike for the job. One person left work due to an inability to meet the employer's standards. However, the employer identified another position for the person within the workplace.

During the course of the year, two individuals left services and selected a new vendor. This is down 50% or 2 people versus four from last year. Notably, one individual who changed vendors did so because his vocational rehabilitation counselor felt he would be best served by a male job coach. At the time, we were an all female staff. One male was hired mid year.

Goal 13:

Are customer complaints handled within a timely manner?

All complaints from customers were addressed within 24 hours or sooner of notification. It took differing amounts of time to resolve the complaint depending upon the issue on hand. Some complaints related to timeliness of service delivery specifically developing jobs. Again, this was impacted by hours authorized for service delivery. Whenever, this occurred we explained the situation to the customer and advised them to contact their vocational rehabilitation counselor. One customer wanted a new job. The employment specialist assisted him with submitting an application to DRS. However, his case was not reopened. We recommended he contact the counselor. One customer needed assistance with his benefits. We worked closely with him and the case manager to resolve this problem. One vocational rehabilitation counselor had complaints related to when we chose to move a person from job site training to stabilization and follow along. A meeting was held with the supervisor and counselor. Additionally, the program manager attended trainings and met with staff.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

First, as previously stated we need to continue to find ways to improve communication with State Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors. To further our efforts in this area we will have all Business Connections staff meet with all DRS offices to explore new referrals and

operating procedures. In the past we have had pairs of direct service staff work closely with various county offices. Now, all staff will get to know all counselors.

Business Connection staff will take all new referrals in the DRS office and hope to include the rehabilitation counselor. In the past, we have taken referrals in however the counselor preferred. For example, we took referrals over the telephone. One concern with the office meeting approach is to be sure that this does not negate meeting the new referral in the community (i.e. home visit, spending time together etc...). If done, this could negatively impact service delivery. For example, this year, upon meeting with a consumer in one counselor's office we were told that we did not need to perform our usual customer assessment (functional assessment) activities. In other words, the office visit would be used in lieu of the normal process where we spend some time getting to know the customer (refer back to Customer Assessment under the program description portion of this report for more details).

We feel that Customer Assessment is an important part of the supported employment process, without it we will have difficulty representing the job seeker to potential employers, particularly if the job is to be carved or created. Although, we will strongly encourage having the first meeting at the counselor's office, we will closely monitor how this impacts are Customer Assessment activities. Ideally, the intake would be in the counselor's office or within the person's home. Afterwards, we would receive authorization needed to conduct a functional assessment.

Management and staff will work with DRS to try and develop creative ideas to continue services as the State deals with a shortage of funding and closing of all categories under the Order of Selection. Management will make contact with regional and/or county office managers

to determine possible next steps in this area. They will also attend any ESO meetings to see how to offer ideas that may be of assistance.

Management will continue to educate staff and as needed consult with vocational rehabilitation counselors about what constitutes stabilization in employment. Staff will receive ongoing guidance on this issue. Also, to improve communication between all parties we will continue to encourage DRS counselors to visit the job site prior to the worker going in to follow along status.

We will continue to reach out to underserved groups. This includes ongoing efforts to find new in roads and maintain relations with organizations, and people who are underserved. We feel that establishing a vendorship under the Medicaid MRDD Waiver will move us closer to serving individuals with Autism and other severe disabilities. We anticipate having this in place in before the end of the year. Afterwards, we will begin outreach with Community Service Board Mental Retardation Directors and Case Managers, as well as individuals with disabilities and their family members.

We will continue to build our relationship with Faison and other schools to serve individuals with autism. Also we will serve veterans and work toward establishing service for military personnel who were injured in Iraq and are attending the hospital's transitional living program. We are also looking at serving the homeless mentally ill.

We will keep promoting our situational assessment services. To date we still have not established a solid referral network within the schools. There continues to be funding issues. We will be investigating how services provided under the Medicaid MRDD waiver may help fund this option.

We will continue to seek ways to improve our timeliness of service delivery. Right now, we are faced with a variety of funding issues. We believe that finding ways to blend and braid other funding sources as well as locating new sources of referrals and funding should help here.

We will continue to try and find more innovative ways to improve our efficiency in timeliness of service delivery. We will further review the viability of using a working interview as a useful approach for the people we serve.

We will continue to work with this business and promote telework as an employment option. This will be accomplished through our ongoing relationship with CORA.

We will review the quality indicators, and data base to determine if any elements need to be added or deleted. We are also looking at going as paperless. This will include an on line referral, program documentation, and billing system.

To further our ongoing staff development efforts each employment specialist will be assigned a mentor. The mentors will be senior RRTC personnel. Each mentor will work closely with a staff member accomplish training goals documented within the employee's work plan.

Appendix A

Appendix B

Appendix C