# *Supported Employment: It's Working in Alabama*

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the changes that one southern state made to improve the quality of employment services for individuals with significant disabilities. A new supported employment payment system is shared that compensates the employment service providers based upon the outcomes achieved by the employee in competitive employment. In addition a newly developed personnel training certificate program will be shared that integrates the new payment system with best practices in supported employment using an employee-directed approach. Participant training data and preliminary outcomes will demonstrate the supported employment quality improvements.

Despite the growing number of individuals with disabilities participating in competitive employment, there remains an alarming high rate of underemployment and unemployment among this untapped labor source. These high unemployment rates continue for this country's largest minority group in a time of record low national unemployment and in spite of repeated demonstrations of their ability to achieve gainful employment. Policy makers and people with disabilities are demanding an answer to the question: Why aren't more people with significant disabilities able to obtain and maintain competitive employment?

Supported employment is a program specifically targeted to assist those individuals with the most significant disabilities to achieve community integrated competitive employment. Yet, some have suggested that supported employment has underachieved its promise and potential ( Wehman & Kregel, 1995; Mank, 1995) while others have suggested that perhaps it may simply be a failed program. Most including researchers, rehabilitation service providers, and others have concluded that this troubling incongruity between what we know can be achieved and what in effect is occurring can be traced to a few significant implementation issues that are unique to supported employment.

One of the major issues confronting supported employment implementation has been traced to the lack of trained personnel in the field of community rehabilitation (Bowe, 1993; Mank, 1995). Perhaps the most critical part of any organization is its personnel. This is especially true when the goods or services provided by an organization are primarily the result of human interactions. Such is the case with organizations providing community employment services. The best mission statement, policies, procedures, and other organizational structures may be in place, but the organization will be ineffective without knowledgeable and dedicated staff who work well with individuals with disabilities, businesses, and the community at large. Vital to supported employment is the critical need for training across professionals assisting supported employment participants.

These professionals would include the supported employment service provider with responsibility for the direct delivery of the supported employment services, the state vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors and managers responsible for guidance and management of the supported employment service, and employers who hire and retain workers with significant disabilities.

A large number of the professionals associated with the delivery of supported employment services are not fully equipped to perform their job. Many supported employment service providers come to their first rehabilitation job with little or no experience or training in the field (Everson 1989; Rusch, Trach, Winking, Tines, and Johnson, 1988). This lack of training has resulted in excluding individuals with the most significant disabilities from accessing employment, poor program marketing, inappropriate job matches, ineffective job site training strategies, and inadequate long terms supports. Additionally, many rehabilitation counselors graduate from their university programs without any business courses or knowledge regarding the employment potential of individuals who stand to benefit from supported employment services (Rubin & Roessler, 1995). As a result, vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies hire staff who are: 1) intimidated by the business community and therefore unable to market their service to business customers; 2) unfamiliar with supported employment, resulting in inappropriate supported employment referrals; and 3) inexperienced with business management techniques, resulting in poorly managed contracts when services are purchased from a local supported employment vendor. Too often these failures, on the part of those entrusted to deliver the supported employment service, have been misread and misunderstood as poor performance by individuals with significant disabilities or dismissed as simply a failure of the supported employment program.

As discussed earlier, this lack of training extends into the business community with its on-going levels of workforce reform. Employers are caught between growing labor needs, changing demographics, and fast-paced changes in corporate structures. If an employer has never hired or worked with an individual with a disability, it is natural that there might be some questions and concerns such as productivity or impact on co-worker morale (Brooke & Wehman, 1999). Professionals and individuals with disabilities must be able to anticipate these business concerns and be equipped to directly address their needs.

Personnel training is not the only issue that has plagued supported employment. Another critical implementation issue confronting this rehabilitation service relates to how the VR system has historically compensated supported employment providers for services that they render. Over the last decade supported employment agencies have been compensated by the VR system for providing services. These services are delivered without having to achieve any definable outcomes, such as competitive employment or employment of choice. This fee-for-services system used in most VR agencies across the country is designed to purchase services for VR clients, with significant disabilities, in the hope of obtaining an employment goal.

Partly in responses to this payment system, supported employment provider agencies develop service plans that describe the range of services that will be delivered based upon an hourly price. These services are then purchased for a VR client but are not tied to any tangible outcomes. As a result, supported employment provider agencies may be paid for hours of job development services without having to actually find competitive employment. Or in the case of job coaching services, an agency could be paid for hours of coaching services without having to assist a new

employee in achieving stable employment. Managers in fee-for-service programs who need to bill VR a certain number of hours each month to keep their program solvent may make programmatic decisions based upon funding versus true employee need.  This system of funding sends the message to supported employment service providers that VR will continue to purchase services for an indefinite period (Novak, Mank, Revell, & O'Brien 1999).  In fact, when evaluating the entire fee-for-service system, with its inherent lack of accountability for results, in light of the tremendous personnel training issues facing the rehabilitation field, it is easy to see why those looking for simple solutions might question the effectiveness of supported employment.

This paper examines the changes that one southern state made to improve the quality of employment services for individuals with significant disabilities.  A new supported employment payment system will be shared that compensates employment services providers based upon outcomes achieved by the new employee in competitive employment.  In addition, the authors will show how the new supported employment payment system sparked the development of a successful certificate training program. Participant training data will be shared along with preliminary outcomes that document an improvement in the quality of supported employment services for the state of Alabama.
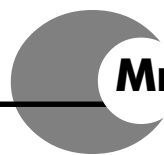
## MILESTONES PAYMENT SYSTEM

The Milestone payment system, developed by the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services, is a leading example of results based funding in the field of rehabilitation.  This payment method is meeting with success and is increasingly being adapted to other national programs such as welfare-to-work and managed care systems.  Simply put, the Milestones system for payment pre-defines incremental outcomes or milestones that must be achieved by the customer, establishes an average cost per individual to each milestone accomplishment, and reimburses the agency/organization based upon the success of the outcome.  Essentially, these Milestone accomplishments are the quality indicators of a successful supported employment program.

When staff associated with the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS), Supported Employment Systems Change project went shopping for examples of true systems change in the area of funding, it was inevitable that they would find this exemplary payment model.  Oklahoma's Milestone payment system is recognized by the Council of State Governments, the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, Duke Universities Sanford School of Management, the Ford Foundation, and the Social Security Administration (O'Brien & Cook, 1998).  At the direction of Lamona Lucas, Commissioner of ADRS, Dan O'Brien, one of the key originators of the Oklahoma Milestones Payment System, was contacted to facilitate the conversion from a fee-for-service based funding system to an outcome-based funding system.  With the backing of the top executives within ADRS, the organization change efforts quickly moved from "are" we going to change to "how" are we going to implement this change.  This set a positive and forwarding looking tone for the newly established supported employment stakeholders group process, and avoided wasting significant time arguing about the advisability of the change.  The stakeholders group, consisting of ADRS executives, rehabilitation counselors and mangers,  supported employment service providers and  job coaches, families, and  individuals  with  disabilities,  were  then

faced with the clear and compelling question of how to implement outcome-based funding in a given time frame that would result in a win/win situation for all stakeholders.

Building upon successes in Oklahoma, the stakeholder group members established a two-phase pilot project aimed at increasing the understanding of Milestones without hurting the operating cash flow of a supported employment service provider or the individuals with significant disabilities seeking employment services. This hold harmless pilot phase allowed service providers and ADRS to operate a dual payment systems, giving both organizations an opportunity to eliminate systems issues.

The phase-in process proved to be the key to success for this organizational change effort. It was anticipated that supported employ-ment service providers would be very concerned about how they were going to be reimbursed and that in some cases, vendors might approach this process with real trepidation. Many vendors under the hourly fee-for-service arrangement simply measured staff performance based on process measures such as number of billable hours generated. Under Milestones, there are no billable hours and the staff performance measures were now focused on finding a job, job acquisition, and job retention. In fairness to individuals with disabilities and to service providers, ADRS arranged for personnel training of those who would be directly affected by the new Milestones system. The Table 1 below presents the series of six meeting that led to the creation of the final Milestones developed by stakeholders.

## Table 1 -- Milestone Meetings

| Sequence | Meeting Objective | Outcome |
|----------|-------------------|---------|
| #1 | Learn more about the Oklahoma experience from Dan O'Brien and a experienced supported employment provider from Oklahoma. | Increase understanding of the Oklahoma Milestone experience. |
| #2 | Develop information gathering teams around each of the five Milestones to include: 1) assessment and career planning, 2) vocational preparation, 3) job development and placement, 4) job site training and fading, and 5) job stabilization. | Team members gain specific expertise around one of the five Milestones. |
| #3 | Share research materials and develop a draft definition of each Milestone, along with outcome indicators to be used by VR counselors to test quality of the service before payment. | Individual team meeting to share knowledge and create definitions for each of the 5 Milestones. |
| #4 | Present draft definitions and corresponding quality indicators to all stakeholders for comment. | Comprehensive Milestones product developed for state-wide distribution. |
| #5 | Establish consensus on each of the five Milestone definitions, descriptions, quality indicators, and percent of total bid to be paid at the completion of each Milestone. | Finalize design for the Milestone system. |
| #6 | Present provider and counselor suggestions for changes to Milestones, based upon feedback from pilot groups. Followed by a public meeting for a wider stakeholder audience. | Formalized system accepted by stakeholders and general public. |

The hold harmless pilot was conducted for a six month period, and a small group of providers were selected for this pilot based on a competitive bid process. Adjustments were made to the Milestone system based upon issues confronting the group while changing over to the new results-based system. Again using the competitive bid process, the second group of pilot programs were funded for a six month period. The final phase was the forced transition of all remaining providers to Milestones following another hold harmless planning period. Table 2 on the following page presents the final set of Milestones for the Alabama supported employment programs. For each Milestone there is a complete explanation of the outcomes to be achieved, description of services to be delivered, and documentation necessary for payment.

As noted in the first column of Table 2, providers are paid a percentage of their contract for accomplishment of each Milestone. The provider payment amount increases based upon the longevity of employment for the new employee and results accomplished by the provider. For example, ADRS agrees to pay a service provider $6,500 for supported employment services; the provider would receive the following payment for accomplishment of each Milestone.

- $975 for accomplishment of Milestone I: Determination of Need,

- $975 for accomplishment of Milestone II: Hire,

- $1,300 for accomplishment of Milestone III: Job Retention,

- $1,300 for accomplishment of Milestone IV: Stabilization, and

- $1,950 for accomplishment of Milestone V: Closure.

It is important to note that the Milestones were amended on three separate occasions following the original design. The changes were made based on provider and counselor feedback from all of the pilot implementation phases. Changes were subject to approval by the stakeholder group before the Milestone system could be implemented.
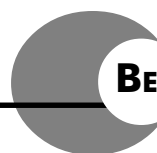
## BEST PRACTICES IN SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

Since the early 1990's, there has been an increasing emphasis on the role of two major service customers: the potential new employee with a significant disability and the employer (Brooke, Inge, Armstrong, & Wehman, 1995). It was critical to success for the new Milestone payment system that all personnel attending the training began to view supported employment participants in terms of their abilities, strengths, and interests, rather than in terms of their disabilities. Once professionals are able to make this important shift in thinking, they are receptive to an employee-directed approach to the delivery of supported employment services. When using an employee-directed approach to supported employment, persons with significant disabilities are involved in all decisions regarding service approach and delivery. These decisions include everything from the selection of the service provider to the identification of the strategies that will assist with career advancement and ultimately facilitate long-term job satisfaction.

This vision of long-term satisfaction is equally important among employer's. An employee-directed approach takes into consideration the employers wants, needs, and interests from the first marketing contact throughout the ongoing employment supports phases (Brooke, Revell, & Green, 1998). When sup-

### TABLE 2 -- ALABAMA MILESTONES FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

| Outcomes & Percentage of Contract for Payment | Service Description | Required Documentation |
|---|---|---|
| **Milestone I (15%): Determination of Need**<br><br>A determination of the consumer's rehabilitation needs has been made through an assessment of the consumer's abilities, preferences, and functional limitations. | A minimum of two situational assessment completed in the community in an integrated work environment. Counselor will have discretion to allow one if consumer and provider agree. A vocational profile may be substituted when situational assessments are determined to be impossible. | • Situational Assessments<br>• Narrative Report<br>• Vocational Profile Substitution Criteria & Report if Applicable |
| **Milestone II (15%): Hire**<br><br>Individual has been hired and has maintained employment for three days in a position that matches the vocational objective in the Individual Plan of Employment. | Job analysis and sequence of job duties have been performed and forms completed. The job in which the individual has been secured meets all federal and state supported employment guidelines and the new employee has begun work. | • Employment Report<br>• Job Analysis Form<br>• Sequence of Job Duties Form |
| **Milestone III (20%): Job Retention**<br><br>The new employee has received the necessary support services in order to perform job duties satisfactorily. | The purpose of the job retention phase is to provide intensive on and off site job supports which assist the worker in adjusting to the demands of the integrated work environment. Fading has occurred when the job coach's focus at the worksite is job maintenance. | • Milestones Narrative Progress Report<br>• Employment/Hours Verification Form |
| **Milestone IV (20%): Stabilization**<br><br>The employee is stable in employment as measured by a satisfied employer, consumer, counselor, and service provider, and the new employee has worked for at least 4 weeks at the IPE weekly hour goal. | The purpose of this retention phase is to provide intensive on and off job site supports that assist the worker adjust to the demands of the integrated work environment leading toward stabilization. | • Employer Evaluation Form<br>• Consumer Job Satisfaction Form<br>• Extended Services Plan<br>• Milestones IV Progress Report<br>• Employment/Hours Verification Form<br>• Employment Report Update |
| **Milestone V (30%): Closure (Status 26)**<br><br>The outcome of the entire process is a worker who meets all required criteria and can be considered rehabilitated by ADRS Counselor. | Closure will be determined to have been made when the case is ready for closure by ADRS Counselor, and the supported employment provider has submitted all required documentation. The worker must have worked at last 90 days beyond stabilization and received adequate training and support after hire, as determined in the IPE. Extended services must include at least two support contacts per month. | • Employment Evaluation Form has been submitted which indicates acceptable job performance.<br>• A Milestone IV Progress Report<br>• A Consumer Job Satisfaction Form has been submitted which indicates consumer satisfaction. |

ported employment service providers are actively engaged in cultivating a strong open relationship between themselves, employees with significant disabilities and the business community, they will always be in a position to deliver a needed service in a timely manner (Flippo, Gibson, & Brooke, 1997).

The following section will demonstrate how the elements described above were incorporated into a supported employment certificate training program consisting of 48 contact hours. The unique features and benefits of this training design will be highlighted. Following this section is a general discussion reviewing Alabama's changes in policy, adaptations to implementation practices, and adjustments to program evaluation in terms of national significance.

## UNIQUE FEATURES AND BENEFITS OF THE MILESTONE CERTIFICATE TRAINING PROGRAM

Clearly, the need for qualified, well trained personnel was vital to the success of Alabama's organizational change efforts. If the Milestone system was to work, the vendors would have to ensure that their staff possessed the compentencies necessary to provide quality supported employment services. In order for a provider to become a vendor under Milestones, all existing and new job coaches would have to complete the Alabama Supported Employment Milestones Certificate training program designed by Virginia Commonwealth University's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center. The certificate training agenda is shown in Table 3 on the following page.

This curriculum, with its employee-directed approach was designed to enable participants to reach a necessary level of competency to carry out reach of the Milestone requirements.

For example, the decision was made that in order for a vendor to complete Milestone I and receive payment, the job coach would have to conduct a minimum of two situational assessments within a community-based integrated work environment. Since situational assessments were new for the majority of the job coaches and rehabilitation counselors, the training was designed to give the participants classroom instruction, simulation experience, and homework assignments for practice and feedback. Unlike traditional job coach training, the Alabama Supported Employment Milestones Certificate Training curriculum had several unique features and benefits. These unique features include the following:

- employee-directed approach to supported employment;

- interagency participation;

- community job analysis drills within local businesses;

- employer issues forum;

- job site training, support, and demonstration;

- evening and home-based application activities and practice; and

- follow-up day for technical assistance.

**Employee-Directed Approach for Individuals with Significant Disabilities.** The textbook used in the course was the VCU Supported Employment Handbook for Job Coaches (Brooke, Inge, Armstrong & Wehman, 1997). Each component of the curriculum stressed the need to involve the supported employment participant with each aspect of the employment service. Competency was achieved through a series of application activities demonstrating knowledge of how to

## *TABLE 3 -- TRAINING AGENDA*

| Learning Objectives | Training Sequence |
|---|---|
| **DAY ONE** | • Pre-class readings and completion of SE papers. |
| 1. Describe the changes in SE over the past decade.<br>2. Understand the various components of SE.<br>3. Able to describe the AL Milestone System.<br>4. Identify best practices in SE.<br>5. List functions of an employment specialist.<br>6. Describe difference between organizational marketing and job development.<br>7. Describe the components of a marketing plan and list at least 3 benefits. | • ADRS history with Milestones.<br>• Overview of a employee-directed approach to SE.<br>• Organizational marketing.<br>• Review homework assignment. |
| **DAY TWO**<br><br>1. Become familiar with the customer profile.<br>2. Develop a functional resume.<br>3. Learn the difference between formal and informal assessments.<br>4. List the criterion for a situational assessment.<br>5. Be able to conduct and complete a job analysis.<br>6. Be able to address business concerns.<br>7. Understand the requirements of Milestone 1 and 2. | • Complete test.<br>• Review homework projects.<br>• Discuss Customer Profile.<br>• Conduct Person-Centered Planning exercise.<br>• Complete Situational Assessment Application activity.<br>• Finish business contacts for job analysis exercise.<br>• Conduct Milestone I and II activity.<br>• Review homework assignments . |
| **DAY THREE**<br><br>1. Learn to match job seekers to jobs.<br>2. Become familiar with issues before customer starts to work.<br>3. Be able to identify natural cues/supports.<br>4. Complete a task analysis.<br>5. Learn to design an instructional program.<br>6. Understand the need for and use of compensatory strategies.<br>7. Understand the requirements of Milestone III. | • Complete test.<br>• Review homework projects.<br>• Present employer panel.<br>• Demonstrate task analysis.<br>• Initiate job site training activities.<br>• Demonstrate data collection demonstration.<br>• Complete compensatory strategies exercise.<br>• Conduct Milestone III activity. |
| **DAY FOUR**<br><br>1. Understand the need for keeping data.<br>2. Learn self management concepts.<br>3. Become familiar with job site modification.<br>4. Gain knowledge about assistive technology.<br>5. Become familiar with fading strategies.<br>6. Be able to develop a plan of long term support.<br>7. Understand the requirements of Milestone IV & V. | • Test<br>• Design a long-term plan of support.<br>• Watch assistive technology video and complete exercise.<br>• Complete Milestone IV & V activity.<br>• Review fieldwork activities for follow-up day.<br>• Discuss directions for receiving technical assistance from VCU via the Internet<br>• Complete evaluations. |
| **Follow-up Day (4-6 weeks following initial training)**<br><br>1. Be able to identify the importance of having a long-term plan of support in place at closure.<br>2. Demonstrate skills and ability to implement situational assessments.<br>3. Gain knowledge of possible stalls and techniques to overcome case load stalls.<br>4. Demonstrate knowledge of each of the five Milestones. | • Review long-term support article (Brooke, Revell & Green, 1998).<br>• Review situational assessment and job site training homework projects.<br>• Play Milestone Jeopardy.<br>• Complete Milestone application activity of quality indicators, accomplishments and case load stalls.<br>• Graduate. |

involve the new employee in achieving his or her career goal despite type or level of disability.

**Interagency Participation.** Unlike a contract payment system where the rehabilitation counselor and job coach rarely meet or have the opportunity to discuss employment issues or concerns, the Milestone payment system is structured so the rehabilitation counselor is directly involved in the success or failure of each Milestone accomplishment. Therefore, in order to ensure a smooth transition into this funding design, it was requested that the rehabilitation liaison counselors and supervisors attend the certificate training program. This interagency approach allowed both the providers and rehabilitation staff to gain a better understanding of their respective work requirements while acquiring detailed knowledge of the Milestone components. It proved to be a direct benefit for both parties.

**Community Job Analysis Drills Within Local Businesses.** In order to match individuals with significant disabilities to appropriate jobs in the community, the job coach needs to have a rich knowledge base about specific businesses and the various jobs within a business. The more direct knowledge a job coach and a job seeker has about individual jobs and the duties involved, the easier it is to match people with careers of choice. When done correctly, this match process will yield satisfied employees and employers and lead to accomplishment of Milestone II. During the training, arrangements were made by the instructors for participants to visit community businesses. Participants were divided into groups of 2 to 3 and were able to gain first hand experience of introducing themselves to a business and asking questions about specific job duties associated with a position in order to complete a job analysis form. This experince was rated as one of the best components of the training, because participants were able to gain experience in an actual business setting as part of a non-threatening educational experience.

**Employer Issues Forum.** During each Milestones training event, a local panel of business representatives were invited to speak to the group about their companies. Each business came prepared to share the qualities that it looks for when interviewing a perspective job candidate. The employer panel included several local employers and a representative from a supplemental staffing agency who disseminated techniques on dealing with business in their efforts to secure jobs. Participants used this opportunity to discuss a variety of employment issues including marketing procedures, job finding strategies, employment fears and concerns, and business partnership directions. The objective of this section was for participants to gain competence in procedures for identifying and meeting the employers needs and thereby ensure successful accomplishment with Milestone III, IV, & V. This training component gave participants confidence in approaching businesses. Members were reassured that employers are looking for skilled and unskilled labor to meet their demands, and the vast majority of businesses are willing to work with rehabilitation agencies and providers to meet their employment needs.

**Job Site Training, Support, and Demonstration.** For many rehabilitation counselors and job coaches, this training was their first experience developing a sequence of job duties, designing a task analysis, collecting probe data, and working with persons with significant disabilities to design compensatory strategies. This training component was critical to ensure the new employee reached work stabilization and the accomplishment of Milestone III, IV, and V. Initially, training participants thought that this component was only designed for employees with cognitive disabilities, with providers serving persons with mental illness being the most resistant. Upon completion of the training, members were able to

articulate why the component was important across disabilities, assess if learning was occuring, and determine if employees reached stabilization.

**Evening and Home-based Application Activities and Practice.** To ensure that participants were acquiring new knowledge, it was critical to the training design that evening work was assigned, as well as home-based practice. Following a full day of instruction, participants were required to work in their community groups (rehabilitation liaison counselor, manager, job coach and program supervisor) and complete an application assignment. An intensive home-based assignment was built into the curriculum allowing job coaches and rehabilitation counselors to work together on a specific project. Participants were asked to establish at least two situational assessment sites in the community and select several supported employment customers for assessment. Job coaches were asked to develop a task analysis and practice systematic instruction with two customers in a business setting.

**Technical Assistance and Follow-up Day**. One month following the initial training, all participants were required to reconvene, hand in home-based projects, and share implementation issues and concerns. This allowed instructors an opportunity to work with individual groups who were experiencing community implementation problems, review home-based projects, and provide additional instruction in content areas that needed developing. Those participants that had completed all classroom instructional hours, work assignments, test, and projects received a certificate of completion of the Supported Employment Milestone Certificate Program from ADRS.

## Signs of Success

There are signs of supported employment success across the state of Alabama. Initially, these signs were limited to the rooms where the personnel training events occurred. Instructors were able to assess an initial level of success through scores that were achieved by participants on their daily test. In addition, participants in the certificate program rated the training extremely high due to instructor knowledge level, interactivity of the design, and comprehensive scope of curriculum. The ADRS Executive Leadership Team reported their gratification with the changes that were occurring as a direct result of the new Milestones payment method with its focus on accountability and outcomes. "I'm grateful to our staff who have so carefully documented our progress. At first we saw our agency cost escalating, then we realized that these projects were serving more people and achieving a lot of outcomes. This is what rehabilitation is all about" (personal communications Lamona Lucas, Director of ADRS, 7/99). Jim Greene, with the ARC of Tuscaloosa, reports that as result of the Milestones training, his employment specialists are spending more upfront time with potential new employees prior to employment. "This is yielding better job matches with improved employment outcomes for employees with significant disabilities" (personal communications, Jim Greene, Director of Supported Employment,1999). Tuscaloosa ARC defined improved employment outcomes as increased hours of employment, higher wages, and longevity of employment. Several of the programs serving individuals with psychiatric disabilities were initially very skeptical regarding developing and conducting situational assessments. Most programs thought that the data collected within the day treatment center was sufficient and that employers would never permit them to use a place of business for assessment purposes. After situational assessments were incorporated into homework exercises, the once apprehensive managers became the most vocal supporters of this assessment technique. One new supporter

was Kerry Weidenback, J.B.S. Mental Health Authority." I found situational assessments to be established easily within a business, an efficient use of staff time, and they produced better information for job matching (personal communication, Kerry Weidenback, Director of J.B.S. Mental Health Authority,1999). Personal testimonials from supported employment leaders along with participant satisfaction and improved program outcomes are signs that supported employment is having an impact in the state of Alabama.

## SUMMARY

Supported employment has always been an extremely distinctive rehabilitation service with its specific focus on individuals with the most significant disabilities, competitive employment outcomes, use of job coaching services, and long term supports. The very features that comprise this unique rehabilitation service have required the service system to reexamine values, policies, and procedures. ADRS is an excellent example of an organization that has reassessed its rehabilitation service system and made a commitment to double its efforts in the area of supported employment. Leadership within ADRS clearly understood the complexity of the issues facing supported employment and knew from the onset that simply changing over to Milestones or simply providing another inservice workshop would not improve the overall system. In addition to the new funding system and the competency-based training, ADRS designated a rehabilitation manger for supported employment, with responsibility for program oversight and technical assistance. Newly trained rehabilitation counselors have been assigned as liaison counselors to specific supported employment programs with management evaluating the overall system. These intensified efforts should prove to be successful for this state and the people served in supported employment.

Clearly, supported employment services benefit individuals with disabilities in a variety of ways to include an opportunity to earn competitive wages and benefits that lead to increased independence, greater community inclusion, removal from disability rolls, improved self-esteem, and establishment of friends and networks. Yet, in order for individuals with disabilities to become contributing members of society, they must have equal access to the supports and services that will assist them in achieving success. Supported employment can be that support. With proper implementation, it will ensure that those individuals with the most significant disabilities are able to participate in this nation's labor force and are included the fabric of their communities.

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