

Extended Services in Supported Employment:

What are providers doing? Are customers satisfied?

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The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of extended services for consumers in supported employment programs. Extended services occur once the individual worker has stabilized on the job and needs less support. Eight nominated provider agencies provided data for 283 extended service consumers, including logging extended service contacts and distributing a satisfaction survey. Extended service interventions occurred an average of twice per month for 67.4 minutes per contact. Time per contact appeared to decrease over time from stabilization. Four of every five contacts were for routine job maintenance checks, with one of five an unplanned but necessary intervention due to work-related or non-work related problems. The need of the agency to address these problems and issues continued over the course of extended services, evidencing the need of consumers for ongoing support for job maintenance. Overall, consumers were satisfied with their jobs and with the extended services they received.

Since 1986, a Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) service option, supported employment, has been a principle avenue by which many thousands of individuals with the most severe disabilities have become competitively employed (Wehman, Revell, & Kregel, 1998; Wehman, 2001). While the strategies inherent to supported employment were initially developed for individuals with moderate to severe mental retardation, they have been modified effectively for individuals with many other types of disabilities, including severe mental illness (Bond, Becker, Drake, Rapp, Meisler, Lehman, Bell, & Blyler, 2001; Drake, McHugo, Bebout, Becker, Harris, Bond, & Quimby, 1999), severe traumatic brain injury (Wehman, Sherron, Kregel, Kreutzer, Tran, & Cifu, 1993), and severe physical disabilities (Inge, 2001).

Supported employment provides ongoing support services in two phases: (1) time-limited employment supports typically funded by state VR agencies, including services such as job development and placement, training at and away from the job site, and necessary job modifications; and (2) extended services such as periodic job skills reinforcement and on-going support, funded by non-VR sources such as state mental retardation, developmental disability or mental health funding agencies (Griffin, Test, Dalton, & Wood, 1995; Wehman et al., 1998). In most States, both of these service phases are vendored by the State agencies to private providers, such as non-profit or for-profit service agencies.

The initial supported employment regulations (Federal Register, August 14, 1987) defined the target population as individuals with severe disabilities for whom competitive employment has not traditionally been an option, and for whom ongoing supports are essential to maintaining competitive employment. Ongoing support services required a minimum of two job contacts per month to monitor job stability. Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act in 1992 added language which redefined the target population as VR consumers “with the most severe disabilities” in an effort to insure that programs serve those who are most need of intensive and ongoing supports (Federal Register, June 24, 1992).

Since the inception of supported employment, extended services has been a defining characteristic of the program, and the need for extended services a defining eligibility criterion (c.f., Federal Register, August 14, 1987). The importance of follow-along supports in employment have been validated in a variety of research studies, particularly in the area of supported employment for individuals with severe mental illness (Bond et al, 2001; McHugo, Drake, et al, 1998). However, the research literature on supported employment has focused largely on the time-limited phase, in large part due to the political landscape in which the program operates. The time-limited component is funded and administered through State VR agencies, using a uniform data collection system (the RSA-911 Case Service Report), and it is subject to a common set of regulations.

In contrast, extended services may be funded and administered through multiple State agencies, including mental health, mental retardation/developmental disability, Medicaid, health, labor, and VR (West, Johnson, Cone, Hernandez, & Revell, 1998). Data collection and reporting requirements and capabilities vary not only across states, but also across agencies within each State. Thus, it is much more difficult to determine both across and within states how extended services operate and how successful they are in achieving desired consumer outcomes such as earnings, fringe benefits, job retention, and career advancement. For a variety of reasons, consistent information is needed on what is happening to individual workers with disabilities after initial placement and support plans have been established. From the perspective of making effective decisions about funding, policy development, and program management, access to accurate information on service need, use, and outcomes is critical. Furthermore, from the perspective of consumer choice and self-determination, information is needed on worker satisfaction level with the services being received and the job opportunities being provided.

In one of only a few studies focused exclusively and directly on extended services, West et al. (1998) surveyed 385 supported employment provider agencies in 40 states for implementation and funding issues. They found not only that providers used a broad array of funding sources, but also that many had no source of funding for extended services, choosing to fund monthly follow-along services from other program revenues. They also found that the method by which these agencies were reimbursed influenced the degree to which the agencies were able to attend to service quality.

Other studies have touched peripherally on extended service issues. For example, West, Kregel, Hernandez, and Hock (1997) examined the use of natural supports in supported employment. Natural supports is a term that denotes the use of individuals, services, cues, and other resources that exist within work or community environments, to support the participation of an individual with significant disabilities in those environments (Hagner, 1995; Kiernan, Schalock, Butterworth, & Sailor, 1993; Test and Wood, 1996). West et al. found that natural support strategies were included in extended service plans by 96% of supported employment agencies, and included coworkers, family members, friends, employee assistance programs, and other public and private agencies.

MacDonald-Wilson, Revell, Nguyen & Peterson (1991) reported on the reasons for job separations among individu-

als in supported employment, as well as the time-limited and the extended services interventions patterns of support provided by job coaches up to one year after job placement in supported employment.

Extended service issues have also been addressed peripherally in national policy studies conducted by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment at Virginia Commonwealth University. These studies have documented that as the program has grown, proportionally more consumers are being maintained in extended services than are coming in as new, time-limited consumers, with a corresponding trend in service funding. Wehman et al., (1998) found that in 1995 62.5% of identified supported employment participants were in the extended services phase, and that over 72% of all supported employment funding came from non-VR sources, presumably for extended services. These findings show that the VR investment in time-limited services has leveraged substantially more service dollars from other State agencies for maintaining employment supports to consumers.

Job terminations and changes are fairly common experiences for supported employment consumers, particularly for individuals with mental retardation (Moran, McDermott, & Butkus, 2002). Many individuals who lost their supported employment positions remain out of the workforce or return to segregated work settings (Moran et al., 2002; Murphy, Rogan, Handley, Kincaid, & Royce-Davis, 2002). Strategies for promoting long-term job maintenance and smooth job transitions are critical needs for provider agencies. Research on extended services is essential to improving service efficiency and quality, and enhancing long-term consumer employment outcomes, such as job retention and career advancement. The current study was undertaken to examine issues and practices related to the nature of extended services and impacts on consumers. In particular, the study addresses the following questions:

1. How do exemplary supported employment provider agencies plan and deliver extended services?
2. What are the types and extent of services that are provided? and
3. How do consumers of services feel about the extent and quality of extended services they receive?

Method

Participants and Settings

The participants in this study were staff and consumers of eight supported employment provider agencies that were nominated to the researchers. The criteria for nomination and selection included: (1) Nominated agencies should currently serve large numbers of consumers in supported employment and particularly in extended services; (2) Selected agencies should be nationally dispersed geographically; (3) As a group agencies should serve a variety of types of disabilities; and (4) Selected agencies must agree to complete the data collection requirements described further in this report. The eight agencies had a total of 283 individuals receiving extended services.

Instrumentation

Draft instruments were developed and distributed to the participating agencies prior to initiating data collection. Agency staff were encouraged to suggest modifications to the items or the response levels. The final instrumentation consisted of the following items, all of which are appended:

Telephone survey. A brief telephone survey was developed which targeted areas related to extended services funding and service delivery issues. The respondents included each participating agency's staff member responsible for the supported employment program as a whole, or an individual specifically responsible for delivering extended services, as appropriate to each agency. In some agencies, two respondents were surveyed in order to obtain information for each item.

Contact logs. Participating agencies completed logs of extended service contacts delivered during one month. Log entries included (1) whether the contact was a planned job maintenance contact or an unplanned but necessary contact; (2) if unplanned, the individual who initiated the contact; (3) the consumer's period of time post-VR closure, in three-month increments; and (4) space for staff to provide a brief description of the primary activity or activities which occurred during the contact. Contact logs were not designed to be consumer-specific.

Satisfaction surveys. A satisfaction survey was developed which requested consumers to indicate their satisfaction, using a Likert-scale, with (1) their pay, fringe benefits, and working conditions when they started their job; (2) current level of contact with their job coach or other agency staff member; (3) the amount of assistance received for job performance or career advancement; and (4) current level of satisfaction with pay, fringe benefits, and working conditions. The survey also included perceptions of respondents' perceptions of their agency's responsiveness to their extended service needs in open-ended format. One item was also included which requested the respondent's status as either (1) a supported employment consumer; (2) a parent, guardian, or other family member of a supported employment consumer; or (3) a paid assistant completing the form under the direction of a supported employment consumer.

Procedure

Sample selection. Nominations for exemplary supported employment programs were solicited from the Supported Employment Consortium members, which included a number of organizations and individuals who have been active in the development of supported employment, expanding its use in Vocational Rehabilitation programs, and encouraging quality methods and outcomes. From the initial set of nominations, ten programs were selected based on geographic dispersion and disability group(s) served. After initial contacts, two programs were removed from consideration because one declined to participate and the other did not directly serve consumers but was a resource center for to multiple provider agencies, resulting in a total sample of eight agencies.

Instrument development. Drafts of the data collection instruments were developed and reviewed both internally and externally with the Supported Employment Consortium partner agencies. Following selection of the participating agencies, the revised drafts were also distributed to staff of the selected agencies for their assessments of feasibility and ease of completion. Their comments resulted in further improvements to the instruments. For the consumer satisfaction surveys, procedures were put in place that allowed consumers to receive personal assistance through a disinterested third party if needed to complete the survey.

Data collection and analysis. Quantitative data were aggregated using database and statistical software. Data analysis included computation of descriptive statistics (means and frequencies). Responses to open-ended items were analyzed and interpreted qualitatively, through inductive content analysis and analyst-constructed typologies (Patton, 1990).

Results

Structured Interviews

Service delivery. Respondents from two of the eight agencies stated that their agency had dedicated positions for extended services monitoring. Four stated that the employment specialist who provided the initial training delivered extended services. The remaining two described a combination approach in which dedicated staff members monitored some consumers, such as those with severe behavioral problems. All were able to cite benefits of their particular method for delivering services. Those using dedicated staff stated that their method allowed for specialization of knowledge and skills, and also freed training staff for new placements. Those using the original employment specialist cited the relationships that develop between consumer, staff member, employer, and coworkers, and how their method provided continuity of support.

All respondents stated that they used natural supports, i.e., coworkers, supervisors, family, friends, etc., in planning and delivering extended services. However, one respondent stated that they used natural support providers only as a last resort. When asked if they had encountered situations where natural supports were not sufficient or effective, most were able to provide examples that included:

- Other workers are unable or unwilling to assist the consumer;
- A consumer's behavioral problems are too great for other workers to control;
- High turnover rates of employees, supervisors, or managers; and
- The supported employee is in a position in which he is isolated from other workers.

Funding issues. Largely due to the broad array of disability groups served, the responding agencies used a variety of funding sources for extended services, including State mental health agencies, mental retardation/developmental disability agencies, school systems, Medicaid Home and Community Based Waivers, State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, and contract funds generated by group work options. When asked if their extended services funding covered the cost of services, respondents from five of the eight (62.5%) agencies indicated that they did not. Most thought that extended services funding fell far short of actual costs, by some estimates only covering 50% of actual expenditures, requiring them to use funds from other sources to continue to deliver services to their extended service consumers.

Contact Logs

Participating agency staff completed 542 log records of extended service contacts for the 283 extended service consumers, for a mean of 1.92 contacts per consumer over the course of the month. Of all extended service contacts during the one-month data collection period, 80.1% were for planned, routine job maintenance contacts, and 19.9% were for unplanned but necessary interventions. For the unplanned interventions, just under one-third (32.6%) were initiated by the

consumers' supervisors. Consumers themselves initiated a contact 30.4% of the time, followed by parents or other family members (13.0%), coworkers (6.5%), and others (17.4%), which included primarily casemanagers, counselors, and the employment specialists or other supported employment staff members. The mean time required for each extended service contact was 67.4 minutes, with a range of 1 minute to 510 minutes (8.5 hours). Table 1 below presents mean length of contact by the length of time from VR closure, and therefore time in extended services.

Table 1 -- Mean Time Per Extended Services Contact by Months Post-VR Closure

Months Post-VR Closure	Minutes per Contact	Number of Contacts
Less than 3	90.7	94
3 to 6	76.6	59
6 to 9	61.2	30
9 to 12	73.6	36
12 to 18	65.2	62
More than 18	56.1	228

The extended service contact log requested respondents to indicate the primary activity that occurred during the contact. Initial reviews of the written responses yielded the following eight categories for post hoc coding:

- Routine contacts with the consumer, supervisor, and others to assess the consumer's job performance, job satisfaction, and other general issues;
- Assistance with current job duties, either in the form of additional training or physically assisting the consumer perform the work;
- Training the consumer in new job duties assigned to the consumer post-closure;
- Work-related problem resolution, which could include slow work, low productivity, inappropriate work behaviors, poor hygiene, and other problems;
- Non-work related problem resolution, which included areas outside of the work environment but which indirectly impinged on the consumer's employment, including problems with transportation, medications or health issues, clothing needs, housing, etc.;
- Crisis management, in which the consumer was in immediate danger of job loss due to extreme circumstances, such as fighting, leaving the job, active psychosis, hospitalization, etc.; and
- Career advancement activities, such as assisting the consumer to access additional training, increase work hours or salary, locate another position within the same or different company.

Table 2 on the following page shows the primary activity that occurred during the planned and unplanned extended service contacts. As this table shows, most (59.2%) of the planned contacts were for routine job maintenance (i.e., check-

ups). However, in a substantial number of contacts the staff member performed corrective actions, such as resolving problems at the work site (16.1%) or away from the work site (3.5%), or assisted with the consumer's work duties (11.8%). Not surprisingly, the majority (77.7%) of unplanned but necessary contacts were for problem resolution either at work or away from work or for management of crisis situations.

Table 3 below shows primary activities cross-tabulated with time from VR closure (and initiation of extended services) in months.

Table 2 -- Primary Activity During Extended Service Contacts

Activity	Planned Contacts (n = 434)		Unplanned Contacts (n = 108)	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Routine job maintenance contact	257	59.2%	3	2.7%
Assistance with current work skills	51	11.8%	2	1.9%
Training in new work skills	10	2.3%	2	1.9%
Work-related problem resolution	70	16.1%	51	47.2%
Non-work related problem resolution	15	3.5%	24	22.2%
Crisis management	3	0.7%	9	8.3%
Career advancement	26	6.0%	10	9.3%
Other	2	0.4%	7	6.5%

Table 3 -- Purpose of Extended Service Contact Across Time Post-VR Closure

Purpose of Contact	Months Post-VR Closure					
	> 3	3 - 6	6 - 9	9 - 12	12 - 18	> 18
Routine job maintenance contact	62.8%	23.7%	60.0%	61.1%	54.8%	45.2%
Assistance with current work skills	2.1%	10.2%	3.3%	5.6%	0%	16.2%
Training in new work skills	1.1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4.4%
Work-related problem resolution	21.3%	23.7%	36.7%	22.2%	27.4%	19.3%
Non-work related problem resolution	4.3%	22.0%	0%	0%	1.6%	7.0%
Crisis management	1.1%	0%	0%	5.6%	8.1%	1.3%
Career advancement	6.4%	20.3%	0%	2.8%	6.5%	5.3%
Other	1.1%	0%	0%	2.8%	1.6%	1.3%

Satisfaction Surveys

As reported earlier, 123 consumer satisfaction surveys were returned, for a return rate of 43%. Of these 123 surveys, 86 (69.9%) were completed by consumers, 36 (29.3%) were completed by parents or guardians, and 1 (0.8%) was completed by a paid assistant responding on behalf of a supported employment consumer.

Results of the satisfaction items are presented in Table 4 below. As this table shows, high percentages of consumers indicated that they were either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their jobs and the services they received. Job satisfaction levels appear to decline to a limited degree from the initial job placement to the time of the survey. The lowest levels of satisfaction appear to be with the frequency of job coach contacts, with 8.1% of respondents indicating that they were somewhat or very dissatisfied. Chi-square analysis showed no statistically significant differences in satisfaction across respondent categories (i.e., consumer, parent or other).

Table 4 -- Extended Service Consumer Satisfaction

	Initially Satisfied with Job		Satisfied with Job Coach Contacts		Satisfied with Help Received		Satisfied with Job Now	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Very Satisfied	92	74.8%	73	59.3%	84	68.3%	74	60.2%
Somewhat Satisfied	18	1.46%	27	22.0%	20	16.3%	25	20.3%
Neutral or N/A	9	7.3%	13	10.6%	12	9.8%	12	9.8%
Somewhat Dissatisfied	3	2.4%	7	5.7%	3	2.4%	9	7.3%
Very Dissatisfied	1	0.8%	3	2.4%	4	3.3%	3	2.4%

Thirty-eight individuals (30.9%) indicated that they had spoken with their Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor regarding making a job change. Of these 38, 32 (84.2%) indicated that they thought the Counselor was willing to assist them in finding another job. Of the 123 respondents, 113 (91.9%) indicated that they thought that they could call their job coach or someone else in the supported employment agency with a problem and get help.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the nature of extended services for consumers in supported employment programs. Extended services occur once the individual worker has 'stabilized' on the job and needs less and less support. This reduction in support may be from coworkers, job coaches or other forms of specialized assistance to help the person retain the position. Extended services, offered for as long as an individual is employed, is one of the unique features of supported employment, contributing to the model's success for persons who have significant support needs (Brooke, Revell, and Green, 1998; Peterson, 1995).

Supported employment programs and research have focused extensively on the job development, hiring and on-site training techniques and much less on the postemployment activities especially those that occur months later. This is an important area to research; even with support, job turnover does occur for many of these workers and the stream of funding becomes much more difficult to maintain. The long-term funding issue is a critical one because there is often a lack of clarity over what services are being purchased, how much these services should cost and who should be paying for them.

There were two types of contacts recorded by the participating agencies, planned contacts (n=434) and unplanned contacts (n=108). That one out of every five contacts was unplanned but necessary suggests that consumers served by the participating agencies were truly in need of ongoing interventions for job maintenance purposes. The planned contacts were primarily routine job maintenance (59%) work related problem resolution (16%) and assistance with work skills (11%). Not surprisingly, work related and non-work related problem resolutions made up over 70% of the unplanned contacts. This information itself is of limited value until you realize that the mean time for each extended service contact per month was 67 minutes, actually very little. There was a range of one minute to 510 minutes, but clearly most of these consumers required very little support once they were stabilized on the work site even when problems arose.

Although there are some limitations due to fewer contacts (and presumably consumers) in the mid-ranges, some patterns do emerge related to the nature of extended service contacts. First, as shown in Table 1, time per contact decreases over the course of extended services. Contacts for those who were within three months of VR closure averaged 90 minutes, but less than an hour for those who were at least 18 months post-closure. Second, the need to resolve work-related problems appears to remain fairly constant even well into the job (refer to Table 3), again attesting to consumers' need for ongoing support services. Third, there are "spikes" in the 3-6 month time frame for addressing non-work related problems and career advancement. They both may be due to this time frame being the make-or- break period for a placement and the agency needing to make new placement, work out new transportation problems, address SSI issues, and other similar activities.

Most agency respondents indicated that reimbursements for extended services fell far short of the actual costs of providing the service. As shown by previous supported employment funding studies (Revell, West, & Cheng, 1997; West et al., 1998) these types of funding issues will undoubtedly affect agencies' decisions on resource allocation and, ultimately, service capacity. Provider agencies cannot be expected to increase access to a program if reimbursements do not cover expenses. Resolving funding disincentives is critical to achieving the purposes of the Rehabilitation Act with regard to consumer choice and full access to competitive employment options.

For many consumers, the lack of a funding source may be a prohibitive factor in obtaining upfront supported employment services through the VR agency. For others, the idea of receiving ongoing assistance from natural supports as opposed to a paid service provider may be a much more attractive option. The Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1997 provided some latitude for consumers and provider agencies in cases where it is not possible to identify a source for the extended services. In such cases, a statement may be included describing the basis "for concluding that a reasonable expectation that such sources will become available" including the use of natural supports as a source. Not only does this allow individuals who previously had no extended service options to now access supported employment services, but also allows greater choice and flexibility in how and by whom on-going support services are provided.

An employment specialist should consider using natural supports for extended service delivery beginning the very first day of employment. Keeping track of all those support resources in the community and workplace that are already helping or have been identified as potential supports can prove to be valuable sources of assistance at a later date as needs arise or preferences change. For example, providing the supervisor or co-worker mentor with skills to effectively train the individual, teaching a family member to assist with arranging schedules, and having a church member coordinate carpooling will prepare these individuals for continuing that support long after the initial training period has lapsed. Another advantage of establishing extended services supports early on is that the job coach is afforded the opportunity to monitor the supports, work out any problems that arise, and arrange any additional support that is needed while he or she is still actively involved with service delivery.

In preparing for on-going supports, one should think about every need that exists now or could potentially exist in the future. At the same time, one should plan ahead and link possible supports previously identified with those needs that may arise. Include those persons who have been active throughout the employment process.

This information is important because we actually know very little about the nature of extended services nor the amount of time necessary to maintain employment for supported workers. It also lets us know that "work related competencies" on the part of staff are critical. A review of the logs and qualitative comments as well all indicate that what goes on in the context of the workplace is essential. This strongly suggests that continuity of employment specialists with the same clients and business is critical. In order to be the most efficient and get the most out the 67 average minutes per month employment representatives need to be very calculated in their use of them.

Another implication of this study which private industry has already learned very well is the importance of quick intervention even if it has to be unplanned. In large businesses (Shrey, 1997) management has learned the cost efficiency of early intervention and use of disability management strategies. The results of this extended services study give credence to the importance of post-employment intervention and increasing the capacity of an agency or a business to quickly provide unplanned interventions for those suddenly at risk of losing their jobs.

In looking at Table 2 it would appear that consumers were predominantly pleased with the level of help they received and contact made. However there was a fairly high core of 15-18% of persons that consistently were neutral or not satisfied which is troubling. One has to assume that if a consumer either dislikes his job or the amount of job support received, the more likely they are to become disengaged. This is costly in terms of replacement for the person or agency; it may also have implications for the Social Security agency having to provide more cash payments if the person's work hours are reduced; and medical benefits may also be affected. The loss of employment is a major issue for the person, the business and the public supporting agency and taxpayer. Extended services investment is relatively minor for the tremendous return that can be realized. This study has shown that very little time is necessary and where those interventions need to occur.

One might speculate that if these data are truly accurate, that a business themselves would be better trained to handle this function even if it meant the public agency was "outsourcing" it to them. Clearly, this bears some careful consideration and perhaps further experimenting with willing companies who are comfortable with partnering with local community programs.

There were several very significant and unfortunate limitations of this study that preclude us from making more definitive conclusions. First, all eight of the agencies were nominated and agreed to participate, thus

suggesting they would have possibly better-developed programs than a purely random sample of providers. The second limitation is the potential for the Hawthorne effect in that all program staff knew that their extended service contacts were being monitored and may have altered their behavior or responses accordingly. The third limitation was that confidentiality concerns and potential risks prevented the use of consumer-specific data, so the extended service contact was used as the unit of measurement. This precluded analyses of amounts and types of interventions per consumer, as well as interventions across demographic variables. Knowing more about the functional characteristics, length of institutionalization, earlier employment history, SSI/SSDI histories, and other information would have been enormously helpful for richer conclusions.

Nevertheless, this study has made a start at understanding the complex issue of what is happening to keep supported employment consumers working. A much larger random sample of supported employment consumers and a priori description of these clients, along with the same type of postemployment log system would go along way to helping understand this phenomenon.

Conclusion

Extended services represents one of the least analyzed and researched components of competitive employment for individuals with the most significant disabilities. Yet, it remains one of supported employment's most distinguishing features (Brooke, Green, Revell, 2000). Unlike other rehabilitation service options, the notion of termination of services is never discussed in supported employment. Rather, supported employment seeks to establish and maintain consistent services and support over the longevity of an individual's employment tenure. It is the authors' hope that future research studies will be developed in this area with a much larger sample of consumers of supported employment services. Yet, the field is on the way to a better understanding of the complex issues that surround extended services.

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