

A Survey of Training and Technical Assistance Needs of Community-Based Rehabilitation Providers

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The Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 (PL 102-569) instituted profound changes in the relationship between state vocational rehabilitation service systems and customers with disabilities (Wehman, West, & Kregel, 1997). The amendments provided guiding principles and requirements related to the customer's choice. Subsequently, the 1998 Rehabilitation Act Amendments have strengthened these initial concepts and further expanded the importance and role of community based employment initiatives. In addition to changes in the Rehabilitation Act, there have been changes in the regulations that impact on services. The Americans with Disabilities Act, Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act, Medicaid Home and Community-Based Waiver Program, (West, Revell, & Kregel, 1999) Social Security, Welfare Reform, and School to Work Opportunity Act all impact the knowledge and skills required by services providers to assist individuals with disabilities to access, obtain, and maintain competitive employment. Furthermore the President's Executive Order on Employment for Persons with Disabilities (March, 1998) adds extra intensity to increased need for information on employment for persons with disabilities.

In addition to policy and regulatory changes, there have been continuous advances in work support strategies. Workplace supports are programs or services provided in the workplace which enable individuals with disabilities to be successful in maintaining competitive employment (e.g., Wehman, Bricout, & Kregel, in press). Some supports are formal mechanisms established by vocational rehabilitation programs such as supported employment, (Wehman, Sale, & Parent, 1992) assistive technology, (Inge, et al., 1996) compensatory strategies, and customer-directed services (Wehman, Targett, et al., 1996). Services and concepts such as natural supports, community and workplace supports, person centered-planning, and supported living are rapidly emerging (Wehman & Kregel, 1998). In addition, employers have developed a number of efforts such as return to work, employee assistance, and disability management programs. Employment specialists and other rehabilitation personnel are shifting emphasis from being the providers of services and supports to emphasis on facilitating and orchestrating supports in the community and workplace (Storey, et al., 1998).

There have been over the past decade an array of needs assessment studies on rehabilitation provider needs. We reviewed the literature and have identified in Figure 1 a chart which highlights a number of these studies. Most were regional in scope.

Figure 1 Significant Needs of Those Who Provide Services to Individuals with Disabilities

| Significant Need | Needs Source/Documentation** |
|------------------|------------------------------|
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| <p>Rehabilitation Counselors & Other Community Rehabilitation Personnel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Utilizing Accommodations in the Workplace ● Developing Business Partnerships ● Understanding business ● Empowering Customers ● Funding Strategies for Community Employment | <p>Brooke, V., et al. (1998); Region X CRP Training Needs Survey (1998); Bunting, K.; et al. (1997); Evenson, T. & Kampfe, C. (1997); Griffin, C.C. (1997); Region IV CRP Needs Survey (1996); Region VIII CRP Needs Survey (1995); Bolton, B., & Parker, R.M. (1993)</p> |
| <p>Employment Specialists, Job Coaches & School-to-Work Transition Specialists</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Empowering Customers ● Instituting Job Site Supports ● Marketing & Job Development ● Utilizing Natural Supports ● Understanding Business | <p>Roessler, R. & Rumill, Jr., P. D. (1998); Griffin, C.C. (1997); Unger, D., et al, (1997)</p> |
| <p>CEO=s, Corporate Heads, Small Business Owners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Creating Employment Opportunities ● Recognizing Individuals with Disabilities as Employees, Customers, Suppliers, & Stakeholders | <p>Kregel & Tomiyasu (1994); Hendricks, Dowler, & Judy (1994) Curtis & Campbell (1994)</p> |
| <p>HRD Personnel/Recruiters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Implementing ADA ● Including Individuals with Disabilities in Employee Recruitment ● Attracting Qualified Applicants ● Building Confidence & Interviewing Skills | <p>Brooke, V., et al. (1998); Bunting, K., et al. (1997); Butterworth, J. & Pitt-Catsoupes (1997); Agosta, Brown & Melda, (1993); Fabian, Edleman, & Leedy, (1993)</p> |
| <p>1st Line Supervisors/Managers, Coworkers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Accessing Resources for Workplace Supports ● Identifying & Providing Accommodations ● Retaining & Promoting Quality Employees ● Resolving Workplace Support Problems ● Involving Workers with Disabilities ● Facilitating Workplace Supports | <p>Brooke, V., et al. (1998); Roessler, R., Reed, C., & Brown, P. (1998); Butterworth, J. & Pitt-Catsoupes. (1997); Bunting, K.; et al. (1997); Agosta, Brown & Melda, (1993); Fabian, Edleman, & Leedy, (1993)</p> |

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| <p>Individuals with Disabilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Empowerment ● Career Advancement ● Employment | <p>Rumill & Roessler (1998); Bogdan (1996); Nowak, Laitiner, Stowitschek & Affleck (1995); Turner (1995); Hendricks, Dowler & Judy (1994)</p> |
| <p>Guardians/Advocates/Authorized Representatives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understanding Community/Workplace Supports | <p>Comegys & Ainsworth (1996); Fullerton (1995); Wehymer, Kelchner & Richards (1995); Ward (1993)</p> |

This literature review reflected the rapid changes in the field's knowledge base of employment and reaffirmed how difficult it is for service providers to keep pace. There clearly is a great need for more training, technical assistance, and information on how to be most effective in helping persons with disabilities gain employment. Therefore, it was decided to conduct a national survey of training and information needs of organizations and individuals involved with vocational rehabilitation service provision. The purpose of the survey was to establish a benchmark of knowledge relative to a needs assessment of persons involved in the community rehabilitation process but with a national perspective.

Training Needs Assessment

Participants

Potential survey participants were identified using a national database maintained at a national University based center on employment for persons with disabilities. The database included a myriad of organizations and individuals affiliated with supported employment and/or vocational rehabilitation. The list of participants was reviewed and the most appropriate entities were selected to participate. A final roster of 975 persons was compiled to include supported employment service providers, community case managers, rehabilitation counselors, special educators, professors in institutions of higher education, state and regional mental health agencies, Association of Persons in Supported Employment (APSE) chapters, Centers for Independent Living (CILs), private community based rehabilitation programs and state and regional supported employment agencies.

Instrumentation

The Training/Information Needs Assessment Survey was developed over a 3 month period in order to (1) identify specific, subject matter training needs and (2) determine the most desirable format for delivery of training/information in the field. General content areas and specific survey items were developed primarily by a team of persons with disabilities, family members, vocational rehabilitation professionals, employment service providers, and educators. Survey design experts from the university survey laboratory were also consulted to address instrument design, content and usability issues. Additionally, a comprehensive review of business, psychological, and educational literature was conducted to ensure that critical areas were included in the survey.

The survey was organized into three broad categories: (1) Training Format, (2) Training Content, and (3) Respondent Demographics. The format section contains five sub-sections (Preservice, Inservice, National

Meetings, Written Resources, and Media Resources), while the content section contains twelve sub-sections (ADA, Assessment, Assistive Technology, Empowering Customers, Economic/Societal Trends, Funding, Job Site Support, Marketing and Job Development, Natural Supports, Policy, Social Security and Transition). Each of the 975 survey participants was sent by mail, a packet including a letter providing the study background and purpose, and a copy of the survey instrument and completion instructions. For purposes of tracking and data management, each survey was numbered, in series and assigned to a survey participant. Respondents were given the option of completing the survey "hard-copy" or the option of completing the survey on-line at university center's internet site. "Reminder" post-cards were sent out in approximately 60 day intervals and/or informal telephone follow-ups were completed to facilitate survey completion by those individuals/organizations who had not returned completed surveys.

Results

A total of 277 surveys were received from 46 states and the District of Columbia, with at least one survey received from each responding state for a response rate of just under 30%. Table 1 is presented the affiliation of respondents professionally. Of the respondents, 46% were program managers and administrators, project officers and project coordinators, 35% were employment specialists, job coaches, rehabilitation counselors and vocational counselors, 15% were consumer representatives of Centers' for Independent Living and other community-based rehabilitation programs, peer counselors and consumer advocates. Approximately one-third of all surveys returned were from rural states which, for the purposes of this study, were defined as states in which a majority of the localities reported a population density of fewer than 6 persons per square mile.

| Job Title | Number of Respondents |
|---|-----------------------|
| Managers/Administrators 46% | |
| Project Coordinators | 54 |
| Project Administrators | 46 |
| Project Managers | 20 |
| Project Officer | 8 |
| Direct Service Providers 35% | |
| Job Coaches | 30 |
| Employment Specialists | 28 |
| Rehabilitation Counselors | 21 |
| Vocational Counselors | 19 |
| Consumers, Mentors & Advocates 15% | |
| Center for Independent Living Representative | 13 |
| Peer Counselors | 11 |
| Consumer Advocates | 10 |
| Day Rehabilitation Consumers | 8 |
| Others (Unspecified) 4% | |

The survey participants reported a wide range in rehabilitation and supported employment professional experience, averaging 12 years (sd = 7.95) and 7 years (sd = 5.08) respectively. Further, respondents reported greatly varying amounts of supported employment training, with an average of 302 hours completed (range 0-1000 hours).

Training Format

The survey assessed the need for training via 5 format options: (1) Preservice Training, (2) Inservice Training, (3) National Meetings, (4) Written Resources and (5) Media Resources. Respondents were asked to indicate their preferences for each of the sub-categories listed under the format category options. Respondents could indicate whether they would definitely use, may use or not use each of the identified sub-categories. Table 2 lists a summary of the preferences indicated by the respondents.

Training Content

The survey solicited training needs responses across twelve major content areas. Respondents were asked to rate each sub-category. Definitive training needs were reported in each of the twelve major content areas. Table 3 lists content areas in which definitive training needs were identified.

| | High Priority | Low Priority |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| ADA | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Employer Attitudes & Fears ● Educating Employers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Involving Customers ● Compliance ● Reasonable Addommodations ● Evaluating Workplace Accessibility ● Tax Credits |
| Assessment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Situational Work Assessments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Involving Customers ● Foraml Assessments ● Interpreting Formal Records ● Vocational Evaluation |
| Assistive Technology | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Working with Employers ● Involving the Custoemrs ● Environmental Modifications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Low Technology ● High Technology |

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| Empowering Customers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Self-Determination ● Informed Choice ● Customer Satisfaction ● Career Planning ● Person-Centered Planning | |
| Economic/Societal Trends | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Community Supports ● Self-Employment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Welfare Reform ● Entrepreneurship ● Business/Corporate Employee Recruitment Methods ● One Stop Centers ● Corporate Culture/ Diversified Workforce ● Corporate Restructuring/ Downsizing |
| Funding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Long Term Funding ● Medicaid ● Personal Assistance Services ● Managed Care | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Vocational Rehabilitation ● Job Training Partnership Act |
| Job Site Support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● On-going support ● Self-management strategies ● Coaching/counseling skills ● Consulting/technical assistance skills ● Personal Assistance otj ● Compensatory strategies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Instructional Training Strategies |
| Marketing & Job Development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Developing & expanding employer networks ● Involving your customers ● Job restructuring ● Employer contacts/ communication ● Developing corp. partnerships ● Developing a marketing plan ● Orgnaizational marketing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Disability Awareness |

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| <p>Natural Supports</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop Social Networks ● Co-worker training ● Identifying Business & workplace supports ● Self-advocacy training ● Mentor Relationships | |
| <p>Policy & Law</p> | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rehabilitation Act Amendments ● School to work Opportunities Act ● Personal Assistance Services ● Technology Related Assistance Act ● Carl Perkins Act ● Individuals with Disabilities Education Act ● ADA ● Javis Wagner & O'Day Act |
| <p>Social Security</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Educating your customers about SSA ● SS return to work initiatives ● Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Impairment Related Work Expense (IRWE) ● Social Security Eligibility (SSI) ● Supplemental Security Disability Insurance Eligibility (SSDI) |
| <p>Transition from School to Work</p> | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Community Based Employment ● Interagency Cooperation ● Individualized Transition Planning ● Student/Customer Involvement ● Career Education Curriculum and practices ● Independent Living ● Post Secondary education |

Discussion

As Table 3 noted the overwhelming trend in this study was that rehabilitation providers are seeking information on working closely with businesses on the employment of persons with disabilities. A second trend of the survey was the need for techniques for empowering customers (e.g. person-centered planning, career

planning, facilitating self-determination) of rehabilitation services. Similar to other studies (RSA Region IV, 1995; RSA Region VIII, 1995; RSA Region X, 1997; Griffin, 1997), respondents indicated the following: 1) a high need for knowledge of employer/business cultures, 2) marketing and job development methods, 3) effective strategies for educating employers, 4) strategies for building employer networks, and 5) utilization of assistive technology in the workplace (e.g. working with employers, involving customers, & environmental modifications). Probably the most compelling area for extra training and technical assistance is the job site support intervention area. Along with marketing, most employment specialists who are on the front lines daily will indicate they need as much assistance as possible in helping to create good career options for persons with disabilities especially significant disabilities.

Rehabilitation agencies have less of a sense of urgency, less of an understanding of business culture, and are less customer responsive than other employment services utilized by business (Bunting, et al, 1997). This lack of urgency by rehabilitation programs/professionals in responding to business needs is a common concern among the business community. Rehabilitation professionals must learn to conduct themselves in a business like manner and need to understand business.

Today, self-determination has been incorporated into disability related legislation. Specifically, the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 (PL 102-569) declared the right of individuals to enjoy self-determination. All programs and activities funded under the Act must promote the principle of self-determination. RSA 911 data helps us understand case closure or outcome variables, however, it does not document or clarify process issues such as consumer involvement, choice, and the use of assistive technology to facilitate the rehabilitation process (Whitney-Thomas, et al., 1997). There needs to be a concerted effort to assure a plan is developed and monitored to insure improvement in the level of consumer involvement throughout the rehabilitation service industry.

Contemporary rehabilitation professionals work as counselors, case managers, vocational evaluators, job placement specialists, and social change advocates in a variety of service settings, including private for-profit rehabilitation companies, community nonprofit agencies, school settings, rehabilitation hospitals and centers, and state /federal vocational rehabilitation programs (Bellini, 1997). The goal of vocational rehabilitation service is to assist individuals with disabilities to reach their maximum potential. Bolton and Parker (1993) suggested that rehabilitation professionals must have familiarity with research terminology and statistical procedures. Critical attitudes such as respect and acceptance for an individual as a person, caring for individuals, self-acceptance, self-honesty, and internalization of ethical principles are also required (Evenson and Kampfe, 1997). Rehabilitation professionals should have business culture training and learn more about business needs, practices and issues (Bunting, et al., 1997). Most importantly is the need to address stereotypes and discrimination in the labor market. On September 9, 1997 DATELINE NBC aired a segment, "No Way In", in which John Hockenberry looked at the realities of being disabled in America (NBC News, 1997). This segment highlighted the realities of discrimination people with disabilities face in the labor market.

Rick Douglas, head of disability initiatives in the Department of Labor says, "getting jobs for people with disabilities is the next big significant barrier this nations faces" (Kissane, 1997). Unemployment in America is at its' lowest level in thirty years. There currently is a growing labor shortage of skilled workers. In response to increased requests for H1-B visas, Congress is now considering several proposals to increase the annual cap on H1-B visas so employers may find skilled applicants (Leonard HR Magazine, May 1998). This is at a time when according to most surveys, three out of four individuals with disabilities is unemployed. In spite of progress made under ADA, individuals with disabilities continue to be an over looked and underutilized labor source. The public sector, the private sector, those with resources, and individuals with disabilities must work in partnership to more effectively open the doors to employment and careers.

Preparation of this manuscript was supported in part by Cooperative Agreement #H133B980036 between the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports and the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), U.S. Department of Education This support does not constitute an official endorsement of the opinions expressed in this manuscript.