

Guest Editorial

Funding Consumer Directed Employment Outcomes

Grant Revell^a and Dan O'Brien^b

^aVirginia Commonwealth University, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center, P.O. Box 842011, Richmond, VA 23284-2100, USA

E-mail: wgrevell@mail1.vcu.edu

^bUniversity of North Texas, P.O. Box 31456, Denton, TX 76203-1456, USA

E-mail: DOBrien@scs.unt.edu

The topical theme for this special issue of the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* is Funding Consumer Directed Employment Outcomes. Here is a very brief overview of the evolution of practices around each of the three components of supported employment contained in this topic – funding, consumer directed supports, and employment outcomes.

Funding: Concepts and practices around funding supported employment services have moved over the years from working to develop state and community level agreements to fund supported employment services to a focus on aligning dollars prescriptively to individualized employment supports. For many years, funding representatives controlled funding decisions and allocations, including choice of service providers. Funding practices do vary greatly from state to state and funds for supported employment continue to be scarce in many communities. However, there are an increasing number of examples where consumers control funding decisions through vouchers or personal budgets; where funding representatives meet proactively to match resources to very personalized employment plans; and where funding is matched to targeted employment outcomes.

Consumer Directed: Increasingly, an emphasis on self-determination and informed consumer choice is now the cornerstone of quality supported employment services. The first step in framing an employment plan is asking the question: What are a person's dreams,

interests, and passions related to living and working in the community? The next step is to set up a process where the consumer exercises control over key steps in turning those dreams into employment. Choice of provider; satisfaction with the job outcome as a prerequisite for payment to the provider; the opportunity to turn a job into a career: The extent that the person receiving supports controls these choices are true measures of the extent to which supported employment is consumer directed.

Employment Outcomes: Employment outcomes in supported employment have at times drawn heavily on entry-level jobs in a limited band of predominantly service occupations. Sometimes these jobs were forced choice situations, if a person with a significant or most significant disability was to work. Increasingly, careful job matches are the basis for employment outcomes, frequently involving negotiated arrangements with employers. The concepts of resource ownership, business within a business, and telework are truly representatives of consumer directed employment outcomes.

The five papers presented in this issue are reflective of the evolution in supported employment over the last two decades as represented by the current best practices in funding, consumer directed supports, and employment outcomes. Dan O'Brien, Laurie Ford, and JoAnne Malloy review demonstrations on how alternate funding arrangements such as personal budgets and vouchers can help improve employment outcomes

for individuals with a psychiatric disability. John McGrew and his co-authors detail a very well designed research study on the use of Results Based Funding and its positive impact on a variety of vocational outcomes. Dan O'Brien, the co-editor for this JVR issue, is the lead author for a comprehensive description of the Milestones Results Based Funding approach and its current applications in a variety of states. Michael West and Jane Anderson explore the use of Telework by employees with disabilities and the accommodations and funding options that support its use. In the final paper, Nancy Brooks-Lane, Suzanne Hutcheson, and myself detail two organizational change examples

of community rehabilitation programs that have moved from offering services in a sheltered workshop to a total commitment to community integrated employment opportunities. This paper ends the issue fittingly with a series of consumer examples that are truly reflective of funding and supporting consumer directed employment outcomes. It is my distinct pleasure to pass-on from Dan and a very talented group of supported employment professionals and authors our hope that you, the reader, find these papers to be a valuable source of information on funding consumer directed employment outcomes.