

Florida Provider Network



*University of South Florida, Division of Applied Research and Education Support
Funded by the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council*

Recent Study Shows Little Cost

Most Employers Report No Cost or Low Cost for Accommodating Employees with Disabilities

Almost half of the accommodations needed by employees and job applicants with disabilities cost absolutely nothing. Of those accommodations that do cost, the typical expenditure by employers is around \$600, according to a study conducted by the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), a service of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP).

The real cost of providing accommodations for job applicants and employees with disabilities is one of the issues ODEP is studying as part of a follow-up survey with employers who use JAN. JAN is a free consulting service offering employers workplace

Continued on page 2

Training in Supported Employment Covers a Variety of Topics in Project Sites



By David Guido, USF,
SCIETT Project Manager

Update on Pensacola and Palm Beach Training in Supported Employment

As part of a Florida Developmental Disabilities training grant called Supported Competitive Integrated Employment Training and Technical Assistance (SCIETT), a number of live trainings have been provided in the project pilot sites, Pensacola and West Palm Beach. Each pilot site has had three of five scheduled sessions. The topics have included:

- Introduction to Supported Employment and Natural Supports
- Assessment and Career Planning
- Marketing and Job Development
- Social Security and Work Incentives
- Working with Families
- Organizational Change

The training sessions were provided through the training collaboration of Griffin-Hammis & Associates, LLC, TRN, Inc., the USF-University Center for Excellence on Developmental Disabilities, and Lewis Persons. The training sessions have been well received by the pilot site teams and have also resulted in positive steps towards the improvement of employment supports.

Following each of the training sessions, the pilot site teams engaged in a planning session in order to determine how they will implement the research based effective practices included in the training sessions, as well as their

Continued on page 2

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<http://www.flsupportedemployment.com:8080/phpbb/>



David Guido, USF, and David Hammis, Griffin-Hammis Associates, work with the Palm Beach Training Team to put together a supported employment action plan for the region.

Continued from page 1.

Accommodations: Cost is Low

accommodation solutions, technical assistance regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other disability-related legislation and education on self-employment options.

As of December 2005, ODEP interviewed 890 employers who contacted JAN between January 2004 and June 2005. The employers represented a range of industry sectors and sizes. The accommodation study is ongoing through September 2007. Preliminary findings illustrate some interesting and useful trends, including:

- Employers want to provide accommodations to retain valued and qualified employees. Of the employers who called JAN for accommodation information and solutions, most were doing so to retain or promote current employees, 43% of whom had a college degree or higher.
- Cost of accommodations is low. Of the employers that gave cost information, almost half reported no direct cost for the accommodation (changing a work schedule is an example of a “no-cost” accommodation). The remainder said the accommodation, usually a one-time-only cost, resulted in a typical expense of \$600.
- Employers experience multiple direct and indirect benefits after making accommodations. These include retention of a qualified employee, elimination of costs of training a new employee and increased productivity for the retained worker.

For more information: JAN, 800-526-7234 (V/TTY); ODEP, www.dol.gov/odep

Continued from page 1.

SCIETT Training Project Update...

technical assistance needs. This planning has resulted in the following actions:

1. The identification of several job seekers to participate as the focus of the implementation of Discovery. The SCIETT project staff will spend approximately four full days with each pilot site team to support the beginning of this process and to build capacity around Discovery within the team.
2. The identification of three job seekers to participate as the focus of the development of self-employment options and utilization of Social Security Work Incentives. Again, the SCIETT project staff will work directly with the pilot site teams as they support these individuals towards self-employment.
3. The incorporation of Customized Employment and Supporting Individuals with Developmental Disabilities training sessions into existing college classes. The project has established a relationship with Pensacola Junior College (PJC) and will be offering sessions in classes through the Education and Behavioral Sciences Programs. Additionally, the project will be providing similar sessions for the instructional staff of PJC through their existing professional developmental activities.
4. The involvement of the Business Community through the collaboration with the Business Leadership Network.

The collaboration with job seekers, families, the Vocational Rehabilitation State and Area offices, the local School Districts, the Agency for Persons with Disabilities District offices and Community Rehabilitation Providers was critical to the development of these actions. The implementation of these practices has required the state agencies, in particular, to begin looking at current services and support categories in a different way. In all cases thus far, these agencies have been open to working with the pilot site teams in improving employment supports.

The remaining two training sessions, for each pilot site, will be held in May and June 2006. The topics and registration for these sessions can be accessed by visiting www.flse.net/flprovidernetwork/fnp.asp.

Informed Choice: Supporting Decision-Making in Employment

By Tammara Geary

Historically, people with disabilities have not been afforded the opportunity to make choices. They are often presented with only one option, that being whatever the provider of services has determined to be the appropriate one, or simply the one they offer. Further, there has been an apparent belief that people with disabilities are not capable of making decisions. This seems to be more prevalent when referring to people with cognitive disabilities. All too often, people and programs behave as though having a disability means a person cannot make decisions.

This is simply not true. People with disabilities, including those with cognitive disabilities, are capable of making decisions, and need to have the opportunity to do so. In addition, proper information must be made available to ensure that the person has solid and satisfactory options.

In general, people make decisions based on a variety of factors. Consider how people make life decisions like buying a house or car, selecting a mortgage, selecting a doctor or a day-care provider, or selecting a job. We gather information, ask people for recommendations, research the possibilities, ask valued people in our lives for advice, ask questions and interview the person we are buying from. Then we match that to our personal needs, filter it through our own life experiences, and finally draw a conclusion. We make a decision and move forward with it.

This may all seem quite obvious to the average person, but unfortunately, it is not always the case for people with disabilities, particularly those that may need some level of assistance in the decision-making process.

In part because of that history, and because it is clear that people with disabilities can make choices, the concept of “Informed Choice” has been developed.

While there is no “official definition” of informed choice in law or regulation, the following guidance was offered in the State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program Final Regulations which became effective on March 13, 1997:

“Informed choice is a decision-making process in which the individual analyzes relevant information and selects, with the assistance of the rehabilitation counselor or coordinator, a vocational goal, intermediate rehabilitation objectives, VR services, and VR service providers.” (CFR, February 11, 1997, Vol. 62, No. 28, Rules and Regulations, pp. 6329-6330)

As a provider of employment services, your role is to support the decision-making process by providing whatever assistance is needed to reach a conclusion, and then honor the decision.

Informed Choice includes:

► Accurate Information

The person needs to have the facts, understand the situation, and understand the results of each possibility. Significant people in the person’s life can assist with gathering and understanding the information if needed.

► True Options

The word “options” implies more than one. And the word “true” is used here to indicate that all options should be satisfactory to the individual, meeting the individual’s desires, interests, goals, abilities, etc.

Continued on next page...

2006 New Freedom Initiative Awards to Recognize Efforts to Employ Workers with Disabilities

The US Department of Labor has issued a call for nonprofits, small businesses, corporations and individuals that have demonstrated innovative efforts to improve the employment and workplace environment of people with disabilities to enter the 2006 New Freedom Initiative (NFI) Award. The award recognizes public-private partnerships and programs that have had a positive impact on the employment of people with disabilities through access to assistive technologies, the use of innovative training and hiring and retention strategies. Additional specific nomination criteria are available in the March 2 Federal Register or at www.dol.gov/odep/newfreedom/nfi06.htm under the New Freedom Initiative tab. Receipt of nominations is due May 31, 2006.

Career Planning

Consider again the example of buying a house. When people start looking for a house, there are typically quite a few options within the desired price range and general area, with the desired number of bedrooms, bathrooms, and other features that are valued by the buyer. A good real estate agent will present several houses (options) to the buyer from which they can choose. And if they don't like any of the options, they keep looking!

A good agent would never present only one home, or only one home with the features desired and another that is completely off the mark. Doing so would not be presenting true options and would likely irritate or alienate the potential buyer.

Likewise, true options must be available to people with disabilities in all work and life decisions they face.

▶ Good Advice/Counsel

If advice is desired and needed by the individual, that advice or counsel should be filtered through the individual's goals and interests, and should be designed to help the individual gather and understand information and options. A variety of people can serve as advisors, including spouses, friends, family members, or other significant people in the person's life. The employment or career counselor can also serve as an advisor.

▶ Sufficient Life Experience

Most people's choices are informed by their life experience. Though certainly not true of everybody, many people with disabilities lack significant life experience due to segregation or isolation. People likely have not had the same exposure to the community, and with a 70% unemployment rate, certainly not to the workplace!

When this is the case, opportunities must be created to expand life experience. Strategies may include simple exploration of the community, joining civic or social clubs, accessing public workplaces, informational interviews, job sampling, and more.

▶ Real Control

People have to be in charge of their own lives. Again, that may seem like an obvious statement, but all too frequently this is not the case for people with disabilities. The individual involved should drive the process, and all other participants in the support team function at their direction similar to the ways agents or personal assistants function.

Keep in mind that personal control stimulates ownership and motivation. Consider an event in your life when you have not felt in control. Examples might be losing a job, serious financial strain, an elderly person moving into a nursing home, divorce. In all these cases, there is a loss of control where others make decisions that have a direct impact on you. Frequently those decisions are unwanted – they are not your choice.

Being in a situation where you have little or no control is extraordinarily stressful and unpleasant. While everybody faces some loss of control in life, they typically maintain control of the more mundane elements of life: what you eat, what you wear, who you associate with, where you live, where you work. People with disabilities deserve the same control. A good provider supports the person to assume that role.

▶ Support for Decisions

This means you have to honor the decisions made, even when you disagree. With a solid informed choice process, the person has had the opportunity to consider the options and try them on for "fit." It is that person's life. He or she calls the shots.

Now don't take this to an absurd level. This does not mean supporting somebody to lay on the railroad tracks, or drive without a license, or pursue a career as an art thief, or pursue a career as an astronaut when it is clear the person's limitations won't allow him to pass the basic admission requirements for the profession.

It does mean that when a person makes an informed decision to pursue a career goal or occupation, you support it even when you think another occupation might have suited her better. When she chooses a specific job or workplace, you support it even if you think the other workplace would have offered easier accommodation.

Your role is to provide direction, guidance, options, and clarification, and let the person drive. It is sometimes tough to be the navigator rather than the driver!

▶ Support for Working a Plan

As decisions are made, and plans are created, provide and create whatever support is necessary to make the decision a reality.

Tammara Geary is a consultant in employment services for people with disabilities and can be reached at tammarag@msn.com. This article was abstracted from Customizing Employment: Planning, Developing Opportunities, and Supporting People in the Workplace written for Georgia Project Access, a project funded by the U.S. Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration. Used with permission.

