

# Vocational Histories of Sheltered Workshop Employees Placed in Projects With Industry and Competitive Jobs

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*Abstract:* Job placement histories of 73 sheltered workshop employees placed in Projects With Industry (PWI) or competitive jobs in calendar year 1978 are examined during a 30 month period. Of the 27 people placed in PWI positions, 48% are subsequently placed in competitive jobs. Of the 53 competitive placements in 1978, 60% are competitively employed 7- 1-80. Job variables such as structure appear to be more important to job success than employee demographic variables such as IQ. Two alternatives to individual job placements are discussed.

Several developments now provide sheltered workshops the opportunity to increase competitive job placements: 1) increased emphasis on normalization. 2) improved training technology, e.g. Gold's *try another way* method (1976, 1980a, 1980b) and Bellamy, Horner, & Inman's (1979) *direct service technology*, 3) Projects With Industry (PWI) programs, 4) affirmative action requirements of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (U.S. PL 93-112), and 5) income tax credits for hiring vocational rehabilitation clients and Social Security Disability recipients (U.S. Internal Revenue Service, 1979). Mental retardation literature contains numerous articles on programs and tests but few reports on the job histories of mentally retarded people placed in competitive jobs.

Among mentally retarded individuals, Schalock and Harper (1978) find no relationship between IQ and longevity on the job and Crain (1980) finds no relationship between IQ and wages. Rather, Crain indicates the only demographic variable that correlates with wages is age.

Longevity records range from a low of 18% in the same job after one year (Margalit & Schuchman, 1978) to 82% of former special education students being employed several years after graduation (Crain, 1980). Stabler's (1974) study is typical of job placements—69% in service jobs, 25% in factory jobs, and 6% in other types of jobs. The most commonly cited reason for losing a job is slow performance (e.g. Schalock & Harper, 1978; Sowers, Thompson, & Connis, 1979). Sowers et al. (1979) also examine some factors usually not studied. They report that 70% of food service placements for which the employer has a written job description are successful, none is successful when the employer does not have one.

Projects With Industry programs were initially funded by the Vocational Rehabilitation amendments of 1968 (U.S. PL 90-391) and were expanded under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (U.S. PL 93-112). There are more than 50 PWI projects with more than 2,500 private companies and federal appropriations of 5.5 million in Fiscal Year 1980 (National Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, 1980). While most PWI programs are funded by Vocational Rehabilitation, a few workshops have developed their own PWI's.

The PWI's discussed in this study follow the work adjustment model in which the workshop employee works on location at the participating industry, is supervised by workshop or industry supervisors, and remains on the

workshop's payroll. PWI's provide workshop employees an opportunity to work in a more realistic work setting, an experience which should facilitate transition from sheltered to competitive employment. PWI's also provide an opportunity to earn minimum wages.

This study examines the vocational histories of 73 people placed in PWI and/or competitive jobs in 1978. The study examines types of jobs, longevity, and how helpful PWI's are in leading to competitive employment. The placements are effected by the workshops with no additional funding or staffing beyond that required by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF 1980, 1981).

## The Study

### Method

**Participants.** Participants were 73 sheltered workshop employees who were placed in PWI and/or competitive jobs in calendar year 1978. Ages ranged from 18-57 (mean 26.9). IQ's ranged from 27-101 (mean 54.8 *SD* 12.6). (The employee with the 101 IQ had a hearing loss, communication difficulties, and social problems. Only one other employee had an IQ exceeding 70. That employee had an IQ of 74, a physical disability, and emotional problems.) A total of 26 (36%) of the participants were women. There were 7 participants with epilepsy, 6 were deaf or hard of hearing, 6 had orthopedic handicaps, 5 had cerebral palsy, 1 had kidney disease, 1 a hyperthyroid condition, 1 myatonia dystrophy, and 1 had hypertension. At the time of placement, 43 lived with parents or family, 19 in group homes, 4 in foster homes, 3 with relatives, 2 in boarding homes, and 2 in apartments. On July 1, 1980, 4 had moved from group homes to a home with spouse and child.

The 53 participants placed in competitive positions in 1978 had IQ's of 32-101 (mean 56.1, *SD* 12.5), a mean age of 27.9, and 40% were women. The 27 people placed in PWI positions in 1978 had IQ's of 27-74 (mean 53.4, *SD* 11.8), a mean age of 23.8, and 22% were women. (It should be noted that 7 participants were placed in both PWI and competitive positions in 1978.)

**Procedures.** The Franklin County Board of Mental Retardation (FCBMR) administers sheltered workshops, preschool, school, recreation, residential and other programs for developmentally disabled people in the Columbus, Ohio area. In 1978 FCBMR had three workshops with a total population of approximately 525

employees (clients). Each of the workshops had a habitation program with staff such as a habituation supervisor, work evaluator, training supervisor, work adjustment counselor, speech therapist, nurse-social worker, and aides. During 1978, FCBMR had one and later two job placement specialists. In 1979 and 1980 the program had from zero to two job placement specialists.

Workshop employees were referred to the job placement specialists by the rehabilitation supervisors. Their criteria for referral were usually not based on formal work evaluations but on the following: 1) expressed interest of the employee in competitive employment (the most important factor), 2) quantity and quality of work at the workshop, and 3) social skills. Also, employees who successfully completed janitorial or food service training were automatically referred. Reasons for placing a person in a PWI as opposed to competitive employment were: 1) parents approved of PWI placement but not competitive placement, 2) employee was anxious for competitive work and none was currently available, and 3) an employer needed a large number of people for a PWI. The study involved reviewing and analyzing records kept by job placement specialists for all PWI and competitive job placements in 1978. Records were kept on an ongoing basis and reflected information from employers, employees and workshop staff. The usual follow-up contacts were: an on-site visit once a week for the first month, an on-site visit in months two and three, phone contacts in months four and five, and on-site visits in month six and quarterly thereafter. Placement specialists also worked with employees on an as needed and an emergency basis. The current placement specialist reviewed records and made follow-up contacts around 7-1-80 to see how employees were doing and to verify records. One record was incomplete as a McDonald's employee moved to California in 6-79 and did not respond to letters (coded as unemployed 6-79 to 7-1-80).

Data were collected and coded with regard to: previous competitive job experience, month-by-month work status from 1-1-78 to 7-1-80, types of jobs, wages, insurance benefits, and reasons for leaving a job. Demographic data included: age, sex, IQ, previous institutionalization, residence at first placement, residence on 7-1-80, and physical disabilities.

### Results

A total of 27 people were placed at PWI positions in 1978. Ten were placed at a book bindery

(mean 1.4 months). There were 7 people who mixed and poured cement to make patio stones for a garden store (mean 1.4 months). Also, 7 people performed general labor and assembly work for a charcoal factory (mean 1 month). Lastly, 6 people were placed with a janitorial crew that cleaned State buildings in the evenings (mean 8.6 months). All PWI positions paid the minimum wage.

Of the 27 people placed in PWI positions in 1978, 13 (48%) were subsequently placed in competitive jobs. Four were placed at Dishwasher Operator positions, 2 Janitorial, 1 Food Service, 1 Laundry, 1 McDonald's, and 1 Factory. Two were hired from their PWI positions by two former workshop staff who set up their own janitorial services company (Motivating Maintenance) that primarily employed former workshop employees. Another two employees who went from PWI to Janitorial positions left those positions and several months later were hired by Motivating Maintenance. Only 6 PWI employees were competitively employed on 1 July 1980 and 4 of these were with Motivating Maintenance.

In 1978, 58 workshop employees were placed in 64 competitive jobs. Table 1 summarizes their histories and indicates that McDonald's and Hotel Housekeeping categories had the best longevity records. McDonald's positions were part of a demonstration project (Brickey & Campbell, 1981) in which workshop employees were placed in 15 locations at a variety of assignments other than counter workers and manage-

rial. Hotel Housekeeping jobs were with major hotel chains.

In 1979 and the first half of 1980, there were 19 job placements of people who had competitive jobs in 1978 and 7 competitive placements of people who only had PWI jobs in 1978. Not all jobs were secured by placement counselors as some people found their own jobs. In addition to categories previously mentioned, new placements included laborer in a lumber yard and 2 positions cleaning cars in an auto body shop—none lasting more than two months. The other new placement category was janitorial work with Motivating Maintenance Company. There were 4 of five individuals still employed there after 11 or 12 months.

Examining all competitive jobs for the 30 months, 29 different reasons were given by employers, employees, and/or placement counselors for employment separations (in some cases more than one reason per separation is given). Reasons were: 12 speed, 7 absenteeism, 7 tardiness, 7 wanted more hours (4 were McDonald's placements), 6 peer relations, 6 quality of work, 5 took better job, 5 inappropriate behaviors, 4 relations with supervisor, 4 laid off, 4 poor motivation and attitude, 4 felt pressured, 3 grooming, 3 too much variety, 3 quit—reason unclear, 2 feet hurt, 2 required excessive supervision, 2 stature too short to reach equipment, 2 inadequate supervision, 2 transportation, 2 medical problems, 2 only a temporary job, 1 sleeping on job, 1 poor concentration, 1 wanted day hours, 1 abused of-

TABLE 1  
COMPETITIVE JOB PLACEMENTS IN 1978

Position	Number of Placements	Mean Months This Position	Employed 1 July 1980 Same Position	Employed 1 July 1980
McDonald's	17	17.5 +	58%	76%
Hotel Housekeeping	9	15.0+	56%	78%
Janitorial	10	11.4 +	20%	40%
Laundry	5	8.2 +	20%	40%
Food Service—Other	5	7.2 +	20%	80%
Factory	10	7.0+	20%	40%
Dishwasher Operator	7	4.1	0%	29%
Groundskeeper	1	.5	0%	0%
Totals	64	11.3+	33%	60%

\* N = 53. Some were placed more than once.

<sup>b</sup> Pluses indicate that individuals were still employed 7-1-80 and means probably would have been higher if the study had continued.

<sup>c</sup> Includes one individual who worked 26 months as a private housekeeper.

\* One position actually consisted of two part-time jobs which the individual maintained for 30 months.

<sup>e</sup> Since some people were placed in more than one job in 1978, this figure was adjusted to represent how many of the 53 people were employed 7-1-80.

office key and stealing, I could not learn job fast enough, I pregnancy/motherhood, and I family moved. McDonald's had particular problems with employees wanting more hours and Janitorial employers had particular difficulty with supervisory and motivational problems.

While data were kept on wages, an average wage would be misleading as the minimum wage increased from \$2.65 (1978) to \$2.90 (1979) to \$3.10 (1980) and almost all employees received minimum wage or a little higher. One candy factory worker and the private housekeeper received subminimum wages. Two factories paid on a piece rate basis. A hotel laundry position paid \$4.00, a janitorial position paid \$4.43, and an unsuccessful factory position paid \$4.18. With the exception of McDonald's almost all positions were full-time and all but two were permanent positions. Excluding McDonald's, two-thirds of employers paid at least partial medical insurance benefits. McDonald's normally does not provide insurance for part-time employees but when they learned that employees would eventually lose workshop benefits, they generously provided medical insurance benefits.

To determine whether there were significant differences between more and less successful cases, Pearson and Point Bi-Serial tests were used to compare months of employment for the 53 cases with the following variables: age, sex, IQ, residence, previous institutionalization, competitive experience prior to 1978, and presence of a physical disability. Women were more successful than men ( $r = .24, p < .05$ ) and all other variables were not significantly correlated. IQ, for example, was .14 ( $> .05$ ). Point Bi-Serial coefficients and chi squares were used to determine whether PWI placements differed significantly ( $p < .05$ ) from competitive placements on these variables. The only significant difference was that PWI employees were younger ( $r = .20, p < .05$ ). Point biserials and chi squares were used to determine if McDonald's placements differed significantly from other competitive placements. The only significant difference was that fewer McDonald's people had been previously institutionalized.

Using 1979 as a base year, the following estimates of costs and benefits were calculated for the 53 people placed in 1978: If there had been no job placements and the 53 employees had remained at the workshop, workshop administrative costs for the 53 would have been \$154,389 and their earnings would have been \$75,790 ( $\$1/\text{hour} \times 27 \frac{1}{2} \text{ hours} \times 52 \text{ weeks} \times 53 \text{ people}$ ). With placements and follow-up, 1979 workshop

expenses were \$75,104 (\$55,104 for the 227 months some of them were at the workshop when not competitively employed \$20,000 for one-half of salary, fringe, clerical and office expenses for a placement counselor). Their total 1979 earnings were \$189,383 (\$162,540 for 360 months of competitive employment at \$3 hour, 35 hours per week + \$20,813 workshop earnings). Thus workshop expenses decreased 51% while employee earnings increased 150% (some of which would be offset by loss of SS or SSI benefits after a trial work period).

## Discussion

The study demonstrates that a sheltered workshop program can place a substantial number of employees in competitive jobs with no additional funding or staffing beyond that required by CARF. In this study, 10% of the workshops' employees were placed in competitive jobs in one calendar year. The study further demonstrates that placement of large numbers of workshop employees does not need to be limited to mildly mentally retarded individuals. A total of 25 people placed in competitive jobs had IQ's below 55. Further, as in Grain (1980) and Shalock and Harper (1978) there was no significant relationship between IQ and success on the job ( $r = .14$ ).

An emphasis on placement is important in developing a normalized lifestyle for people served by workshops. It also has implications for whether programs continue to spend funds on building more workshops or concentrate efforts and some of those funds on rendering workshops training facilities for community employment.

The janitorial PWI is very successful but the others are disappointing. The major problem with PWI placements is they are difficult to arrange and often only last for a month or two. Certainly longer, more stable PWI's would offer better opportunities for training. The National Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (1980) notes that work adjustment PWI's are the most difficult type of PWI's to carry out. In this study, the janitorial PWI had a long-term contract for cleaning State offices. It had a spin-off effect in that two former supervisors formed their own company (Motivating Maintenance) and hired workshop employees who previously worked for them. Because many of their employees were mentally retarded, the company was given a preference in government contracts. Because of night hours and poor public transportation, the

company offered door to door van service for employees for a fee. Workshops might want to try to replicate this by setting up PWI service contracts and encouraging private enterprise to later absorb them.

Some parents were comfortable with sons and daughters being placed in PWI positions but objected to placement in competitive jobs. PWI positions offered higher earnings than contract work, continuation of Social Security benefits, and supervision by workshop personnel. Although most workshop employees did not have legal guardians, it was not very feasible to try to place someone in a competitive job when the person lived with parents who objected.

The finding that 60% of people placed in competitive jobs in 1978 were competitively employed on 1 July 1980 seems a respectable figure. While only 33% of 1978 placements were working at the same job in July, 1980, the figure also seems respectable when compared with job turnover rates for nonmentally retarded workers in comparable minimum wage jobs. The U.S. Department of Labor (1980) reported a 48% annual turnover rate for manufacturing jobs in 1979. Service jobs and minimum wage jobs typically have much higher turnover rates. McDonald's, for example, had a nationwide crew turnover rate of 175% in 1979 (Rutenbeck, Note 1). Additional resources such as trainer advocates (Pomerantz & Marholin, 1980; Wehman, 1981) would probably have effected even lower failure rates.

The most successful placements were with McDonald's. Their success is underscored by contrasting their record (mean of 17.5 months per employee) with Food Service (7.2 months) and Dishwasher Operator (4.1 months) and the absence of significant differences on demographic variables. Because of the large number of people placed at McDonald's, workshop staff were able to study the jobs in detail and better prepare candidates for these positions (three staff spent a week working at McDonald's positions). McDonald's regional administration and unit managers, wanted the program to work and supported it. This commitment probably resulted in the managers providing more training and making more of an effort than they would with people hired individually or *off the street*. The McDonald's success suggests that group placements may be a much more productive way of placing mentally retarded people than placing them individually with a variety of employers.

Another employer variable that may have accounted for the placement success of McDonald's

and Hotel Housekeeping positions is the very structured nature of the positions. Both have detailed job descriptions employers tend to follow closely (particularly when compared to the other placements). This difference supports Sower et al.'s (1979) experience of a 70% success rate when the employer had a written job description and a 0% success rate when the employer did not have one.

In conclusion, the study finds that a workshop can place a large number of moderately and mildly mentally retarded people in competitive jobs. Employment histories suggest these placements are about as stable as employment of nonmentally retarded workers at minimum wage jobs. Demographic variables such as IQ are not very relevant to success. Rather, variables such as how structured the job was and/or the work and social skills of the employee are more relevant. Thus, placement specialists should focus on the job requirements and whether the individual can meet these requirements. Two alternatives to individual job placements appear to offer the possibility of more stable job placements: 1) group placements (e.g. the McDonald's placements), and 2) using a PWI to spin-off private companies that hire former clients.

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