CONVERSION TO SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT: INITIATIVES AND STRATEGIES

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PREFACE

We at the New Hampshire Developmental Disabilities are pleased to present the first in our publication series of major policy issues affecting individuals with developmental disabilities. Through this series we will address policies and trends and provide readers with practical information in overcoming traditional barriers to the independence, productivity and integration of persons with developmental disabilities. It is our belief that data gathered directly from consumers, family members and service providers provide an essential ingredient in the formulation of effective public policy.

In this particular publication we examine the dynamics involved in conversion from sheltered to community integrated work for individuals with developmental disabilities. We all know that the conversion from one service delivery mechanism to another is a lengthy and challenging experience. Having witnessed such conversion over the past several years in New Hampshire, we are convinced of its merits. We hope that the information contained in this publication will provide others with rationales for conversion and pragmatic ideas for smoothing the conversion process.

We do hope that you find this publication helpful. Please contact us if you have any comments regarding this publication or suggestions for future topics.

Enjoy!

Edward P. Burke,
Executive Director

CONVERSION TO SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT:

INITIATIVES AND STRATEGIES

One of the most dramatic changes in services to people with developmental disabilities in the past decade has been the development of supported employment. Starting with a few scattered demonstration projects in the late 1970s, supported employment quickly gained acceptance as an alternative to traditional vocational services. Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act in 1986 legitimized supported employment as a vocational rehabilitation outcome and provided a specific funding source for this service.

Today, supported employment programs are available in every state and play an increasingly important role in employment services to adults with severe disabilities. Supported employment can be defined as paid employment in integrated settings for people with severe disabilities which is maintained by the provision of ongoing support services. Data from supported employment programs indicate that (a) with appropriate supports, people with any type or severity of disability can succeed in integrated employment, (b) employers are committed to the employment of people with disabilities and (c) supported employment services are generally more cost-effective in the long run than sheltered employment or other day activity programs (Rusch, Chadsey-Rusch, and Johnson, 1989).

Most importantly, the vocational success demonstrated by employees with severe disabilities has challenged the "readiness" or "continuum" approach to vocational services (Bellamy, Rhodes & Albin, 1986; Taylor, 1988). In the continuum approach, a range of settings is provided along a continuum from more restrictive, segregated settings to less restrictive, integrated settings. People with disabilities are placed at different points along the continuum according to their perceived needs and "readiness." Contrasted with the readiness approach is the support approach. The support approach starts with the assumption that all members of a community belong in the community. Instead of placing people into special settings or facilities, support is provided to help people succeed in natural settings. As our thinking about vocational services has begun to change, a movement has developed to convert vocational service agencies from facility-based organizations to support-based organizations (Parent, Hill & Wehman, 1989).

But the complexities of conversion should not be underestimated. Nationally, three times as many people with developmental disabilities are placed into sheltered employment as are entering supported, transitional or competitive employment programs (Kiernan & Conley, 1989). Of the 73% of rehabilitation facilities providing or planning to provide supported employment services, 84% also plan to retain a segregated work facility of some kind for the foreseeable future (National Industries for the Severely Handicapped, 1989).

In changing from a readiness or facility-based approach to a support-based approach, agencies face real and substantial challenges. Any change is difficult and to some degree painful. A proposal for change is likely to encounter both driving forces, tending to support and facilitate the proposal, and restraining forces, tending to thwart or contain the proposal (Brager & Holloway, 1978). A change in employment practices requires some basic modifications in ideology, values and organizational structure. Technical assistance in managing change can be a critical ingredient in the success of the conversion process.

Conversion Initiatives in New Hampshire

Efforts have been undertaken to assist vocational service agencies in New Hampshire with the conversion to supported employment. As one of these efforts, the Developmental Disabilities Council through the Training Resource Network provided training and technical assistance to supported employment programs in three regions of the state over a two year period during 1987 and 1988.

The regions participating in the project varied in population, location within the state, and in the structure of vocational services provided to people with developmental disabilities. In the first region, four vocational service agencies served 89 persons at the start of the project. Except for two group enclaves within local businesses and three individual placements, all of these individuals were served in sheltered settings. In the second region, three agencies served 125 people. Two agencies operated sheltered workshops and the third agency operated cleaning crews employing a total of 12 individuals. In the third region, a single provider ran a sheltered workshop for 25 employees and one work enclave for 10 people. The Area Agencies responsible for overall service delivery and the vocational service providers in these three regions expressed a strong interest in providing more individualized community-based services and a willingness to participate in technical assistance and training efforts.

Training and Technical Assistance

The first step consisted of an assessment of training needs by means of focus groups in each region. These focus groups included key individuals involved in providing vocational services to individuals with disabilities: agency administrators, program managers, direct service personnel and case managers.

The focus groups developed a "menu" of training programs related to supported employment (Table 1). Some training sessions taught specific competencies, such as job development or employment support strategies, while others presented more general values-based information such as normalization and the role of employment.

TABLE 1

Training Menu for Supported Employment

Supported Employment Orientation and Values

Supported Employment Overview and History

Employer Attitudes and Expectations

Marketing Workers with Disabilities to Employers

Developing a Marketing Plan

Developing a Business Plan

Functional Assessment of Career Skills, Interests and Aptitudes

Futures Planning for Individuals

Job Analysis

Skills Training on the Job: Task Analysis

Skills Training on the Job: Teaching Strategies

Generalization and Building Job Independence

Time Studies and Department of Labor Standards

Data Collection Techniques

Applied Behavior Principles

Respectful Behavioral Practices in the Workplace

Workplace Relationships: Integration and Natural Supports

Conversion of Sheltered Facilities to Supported Work

Budget Allocation for Supported Employment

Family Issues on Work for Family Members with Disabilities

Government Incentives and Disincentives to Employment

Introduction to Supervision and Management

Quality Evaluation of Community Employment

Employment Preparation for Youth with Disabilities

Participating agencies selected training programs from this menu which would meet their specific needs. Training was provided primarily to program administrators and to direct service staff. Additional training was offered to members of Boards of Directors of agencies and to special education personnel from the school districts in the regions selected.

In addition to region-specific training, project staff presented a series of nine statewide training sessions. These included:

1. Employment Options for the Future
2. Orientation to Supported Work
3. Department of Labor Standards
4. Employer Attitudes: Hiring Disabled Workers
5. Strategies to Promote Supported Work for Facility-based Programs
6. Tapping the New Labor Force: Employer to Employer
7. Assessing the Quality of the Work Environment
8. Respectful Behavioral Practices in the Workplace
9. Marketing and Job Development

The project also provided technical assistance to vocational service agencies in each region and to the three Area Agencies based on assessed needs and requests. Management consultation was provided to each agency. Consultation included budget analysis and budget development, supervision strategies, leadership training and long-range planning. Agencies developed staffing patterns and job descriptions appropriate for supported employment. Technical assistance emphasized interagency collaboration and cooperative agreements, and the introduction of long-term organizational changes which would outlast the project itself.

Because each agency had unique strengths, histories and priorities, each used technical assistance from the project differently. In one region, job developers met to develop a mechanism for cooperation on marketing and job sharing. In this region, improved strategies for contacting employers and matching job-seekers to job positions were a central need. In another region, project staff participated in the complete reorganization of an agency and development of a conversion budget.

Technical assistance included site visits and observations, targeted interviews and documentation reviews. Each agency received, on request, a written report with specific recommendations for improvement. In all, 19 days of training and 23 days of technical assistance were provided to the three regions.

Results

Data on supported employment were collected at the start of the project in October 1986 and at the end of the first and second years, in July, 1987 and July, 1988. For purposes of this report, only supported employment was tracked, excluding a significant number of successful competitive placements. The results are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Employment Data

	1986	1987	1988
Supported Job Placements	65.	164.	141.
Ave. Hours/week	22.	21.	23.
Ave. Wage/hour	2.38	2.22	2.59
# Workers with Disabilities	3.8	4.1	4.0
# Nondisabled Workers	7.5	21.3	18.7

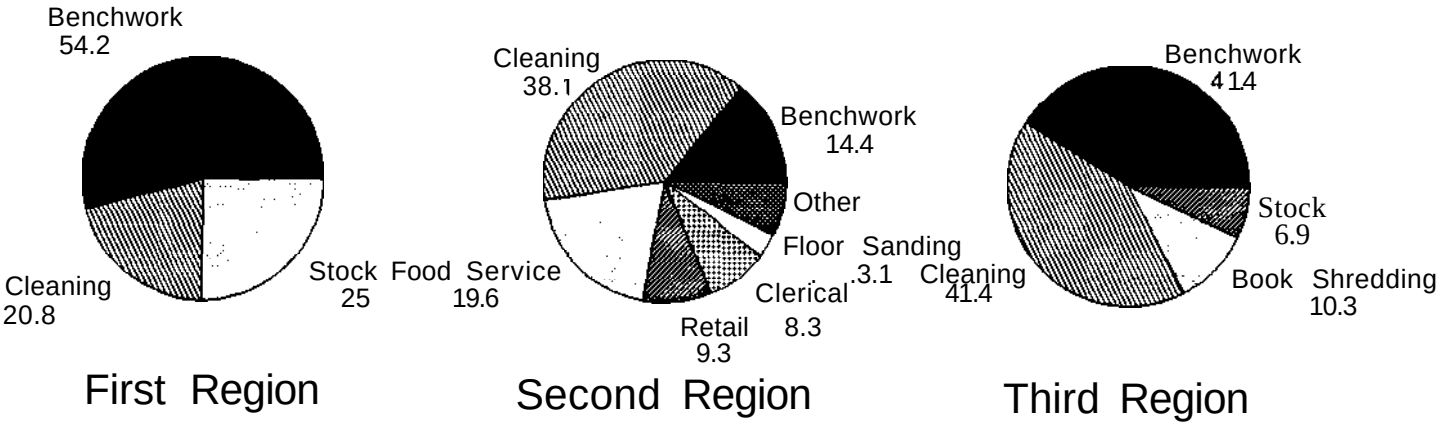
The number of individuals served in community settings increased dramatically over a two year period, from 65 to a total of 141. All three regions reported a significant increase in supported employment placements.

Wages per hour and hours worked per week increased slightly over the project period. The average wage ranged from $2.01 in one region to $2.99 in another. Annual wages earned in the community during the second year of the project totalled $159,338.00. This represents a significant achievement in light of the fact that expanded supported employment opportunities included increased numbers of people with more severe disabilities.

The majority of supported jobs throughout the two-year project were developed for groups of people with disabilities rather than for individuals. The congregation of supported employees actually increased slightly over the two year period, from an average of about 3.8 individuals with disabilities per site to 4.0 per site. The group size at the end of the project ranged from 2.2 persons per site in one region to 7.3 persons per site in another. However, access to non-disabled co-workers rose during the study from 7.5 to 18.7 per site.

Most supported jobs were developed in the occupational categories of production, cleaning, groundskeeping, stock, clerical and service work. But the mix of job types varied distinctly by region (Figure 2).

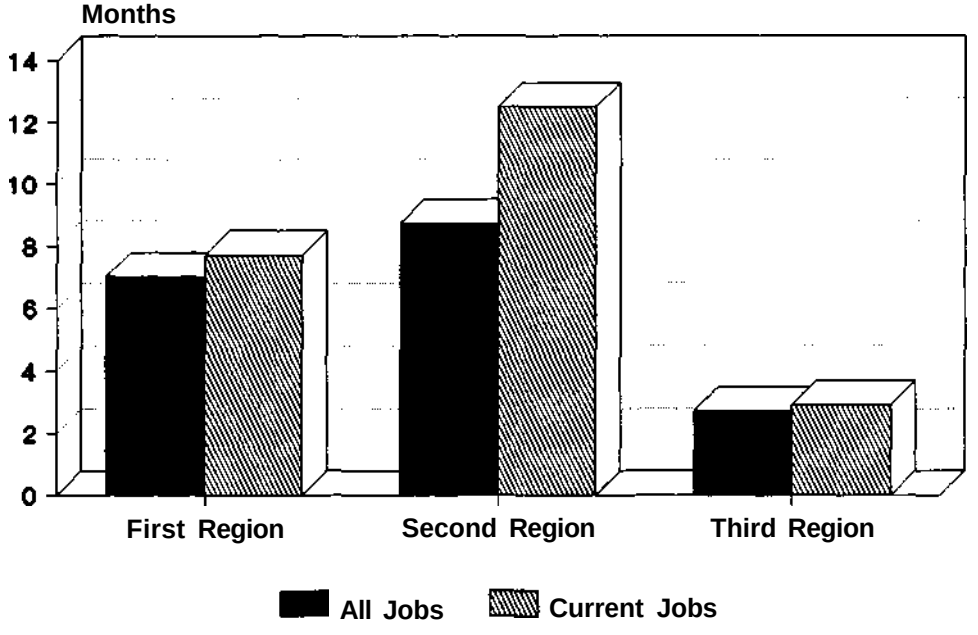
YEAR TWO JOB TYPES



In one region, nearly half of all jobs were production-oriented, while in another there were virtually no production jobs but a great deal of cleaning and grounds work. In part, this reflects diversity in economic base of different regions of the state.

The average duration of employment during the second project year was less than one year. This is not surprising, given that the supported employment programs were new and many participants were experiencing their first non-sheltered work experience. Significant differences were evident across regions, with job duration in one region averaging less than three months (Figure 3).

JOB DURATION



Discussion

Through coordinated efforts, all three regions made significant gains in their capacity to provide work opportunities for people with disabilities in the community. Those problems that remain unresolved - congregation of employees into groups and crews, restriction to a fairly narrow range of occupations, and difficulties in achieving long-term job retention ~ will require continuing attention as supported employment programs gain experience and maturity.

The actual process of conversion varied with each region. However, several general characteristics of successful conversion to supported employment have become clear.

1. Each organization tended to develop in the direction indicated by past experience and successes. Some emphasized particular occupational areas with which staff became familiar; others were more comfortable with one or another "model" of supported employment and tended to focus on that model. Difficulties arise out of this approach. For example, the range of occupations available to the people served by some agencies is very narrow. But as a starting point for change, it is perhaps beneficial and apparently inevitable that an organization will start with what it knows and what it feels secure in doing.

2. Good supported employment management and good conversion management have not required separate skills but simply good management. The agencies with significant difficulties are the same ones which experienced difficulties before conversion became an issue. The management "basics" - a coherent mission and policies, clear objectives and responsibilities, good staff morale, and so forth -- can carry an organization most of the way towards meeting any new challenge.

3. The most obvious and significant problem with conversion efforts to date has been that "conversion" is interpreted as the addition of a new service to a traditional continuum of services rather than a true conversion from facility-based to support-based career services. Many people are satisfied to tack supported employment onto an agency in this way. However, Mcloughlin, Garner and Callahan (1987) noted a number of fundamental problems with this approach. The continued existence of special work facilities perpetuates negative societal perceptions of people with severe disabilities. Special facilities also serve as a type of "safety net" for the service system, reducing the sense of urgency to develop truly integrative services and practices. And the belief that some individuals cannot succeed in community employment becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy that legitimates stagnation, whereas the belief that all persons can succeed in community employment creates a positive self-fulfilling prophecy.

Strategies for Facilitating Conversion

Conversion to supported employment is a complex and, with rare exceptions, a long-term process. Region-specific technical assistance and statewide training over a two-year period provided an opportunity for several organizations to explore and wrestle with the complex mix of forces driving and restraining the conversion to supported employment. Each agency developed strategies for the resolution of one or more conversion obstacles and can provide, in effect, some of the pieces of the conversion puzzle. Together, with the contributions of all of these organizations, a great deal of the puzzle can be solved. The following summary combines the best available information from two years of conversion initiatives. Although by no means complete or as simple to do as to recommend, the ideas below offer some guidance through the major obstacles encountered during the conversion process to supported employment.

How Do we Build a Consensus Favoring Supported Employment?

It is likely that not everyone within an agency will share the values of community-based services, or not with the same degree of clarity or commitment. Successful change depends on the ability to motivate people with different viewpoints to pursue a common goal. Some staff members, administrators or board members may be committed to the facility model of vocational services. Others may be in general agreement but harbor doubts and concerns.

The most common differences in opinion about supported employment are rooted in the continuum of services model, which dictates that people have to "get ready" for participation in community environments. Unfortunately, proponents of the continuum approach have created a "vicious circle" whereby people judged not ready have fewer opportunities to learn appropriate behavior. When these individuals fail to "get ready" under these conditions the initial decision appears to have been legitimate.

Breaking out of this circle requires a degree of optimism and a strong shared commitment to community integration. Several steps can be taken towards this end.

Work towards a coherent vision. Successful agencies have shown a high level of cohesion around shared principles and values. This sense of "membership in an ideological community" (Chernis & Krantz, 1983) acts as a source of support and a point of reference in the midst of confusion. To a large degree this explains why the first successful agency conversions have taken place in smaller agencies.

The basic philosophy and values-base of any organization becomes a part of its "culture" and is diffused throughout the organization in numerous ways. Mission statements, annual goals, job descriptions, newsletters, marketing material, staff evaluation forms, and other such documents ~ even the organization's name - proclaim its basic values. All of these should be carefully examined as part of the change process.

The values of an organization are projected in other unwritten ways as well. At a staff meeting, for example, the order in which topics are covered, the length of time spent on them, who receives praise (or blame) and for what, all highlight what is important to that organization. Even such subtleties as office placement within an organization can convey a message. Planning for conversion includes infusing the values of supported employment throughout an organization.

Offer Values-based Training. Staff development is not only a practical and regulatory necessity but also perhaps the best avenue for the development of a shared vision among members of an organization. The term "values-based training" is often used to refer to training workshops with an emphasis on examining and developing a basic values system for human services.

Other tools available for the development of shared values and a common service vision include staff or staff/board retreats as springboards for a shift in organizational direction and sponsorship of staff memberships in professional or advocacy organizations.

Other education. Information is perhaps the most valuable tool of a change agent. In a field where new ideas and strategies are constantly being developed and tested, opportunities for training and staff development are critical. Avenues of communication include: (a) inviting guest speakers into the agency, (b) making a library of readings and videotapes available, (c) assignment of readings and opportunities for group discussion, (d) arranging for external evaluation or consultation and (e) staff participation in "telecourses," post-secondary or graduate education, and conferences.

How Do We Facilitate the Acceptance of Change?

A philosophical commitment to community integration can find itself competing against some everyday constraints all organizations face, such as inertia, tradition and established power relationships. For example, some facility staff may be worried that their skills will not generalize beyond the sheltered setting. Others may be reluctant to give up the social interactions with other staff and professionals that have become a regular part their facility work routine. Rivalries may exist between factions within an organization regarding whose interests will be advanced or hindered by change.

Build effective work teams. Because change introduces uncertainty, a stronger than usual degree of leadership may be required at the management level during times of change. Some staff members may be unsure of their roles in a restructured organization. Clear direction and assignments can resolve this difficulty. Channels of communication need to be kept open and the tendency for factions to form or rumors to spread needs to be controlled. Maintaining communication both horizontally (among staff) and vertically (between staff and management) is increasingly vital as services become more dispersed and less centered around one or two facilities.

Frequent feedback on performance is important as staff take on new roles. A corresponding openness to feedback from staff, including criticism, should be part of the management style. Organizational rituals such as picnics, annual dinners, exchange of gifts at holidays and other forms of celebration may seem to be a low management priority but are actually critical sources of unity and support within an organization. These should be maintained and strengthened during the conversion process.

Stress participatory decision-making. The more opportunities that staff members have to be a part of the change process, the greater their commitment to the resulting change. Successful participatory strategies have included a staff retreat to map out an overall plan, the formation of working-groups around specific topics and open progress meetings to review successes and obstacles. A relatively "flat" organizational hierarchy - rather than a complex pyramid-style chain-of-command - facilitates organizational change. A delicate balance between leadership and "democracy" seems to be the ideal.

Phase-in organizational restructuring. As the mission and focus of an organization evolves, some structures become obsolete and new ones become important. The greatest need will be for a redesign of job positions, job descriptions and performance evaluation criteria. Job descriptions that no longer relate to the organization's mission must be phased out. Staff performance expectations and reviews should explicitly relate to the goal of helping employees find and keep jobs in the community.

Inevitably, some turnover of personnel will occur due to difficulties in changing with the organization. This turnover can be positive in the long run, since new members will be more likely to understand and share the organization's current values and structure.

Where Can We Find Enough Resources?

There never have been and never will be enough resources. Financial resources for program development are becoming increasingly scarce. And yet advances continue to be made towards integrated employment.

Maximize available resources. Establishment and expansion funds are available annually in New Hampshire and have been a major source of start-up funds for supported employment programs. Maintaining accurate data, including financial systems that clearly identify the cost to the agency of providing employment support and separate that cost from others, allows an agency to advocate for a fair fee-for-service rate for services from funding agencies.

Accurate data should include data on job search activities and the training and adjustment process for each supported employee. The job search process and/or job adjustment process may take longer than what is initially authorized for funding, and additional time can be authorized if the need is documented.

Relationships with secondary school vocational training personnel can be developed that result in a sharing of the cost of job development and training among several parties. Everyone gains from such an arrangement, most of all the students who graduate from school already started on their careers.

Use **creative support approaches.** Some of the more effective and integrative supported employment strategies are also the most cost-effective. A good example is development of individual jobs as opposed to enclaves. Over time, the cost of providing support for several well-designed and well-taught individual jobs can be lower than the cost of operating an enclave.

Staff should become familiar with current best practices in supported employment and incorporate these into the agency's method of operation, as well as procedures for monitoring service quality. Major advances continue to occur in supported employment research, such as the development of strategies for facilitating natural or co-worker supports at work and the utilization of circles of friends in job development. Both of these strategies make efficient use of an agency's resources. Other strategies that have assisted in controlling costs include:

1. Developing jobs in closer proximity to a job-seeker's residence or the job locations of those in the job-seeker's social network who are willing to provide transportation;

2. Securing multiple individual job placements within the same general vicinity, such as a mall or an industrial park; and

3. Making arrangements for employers to take more of the responsibility for providing on-going support, either informally or through the use of stipends or other compensation.

Develop shared-cost arrangements with consumers. The work incentive provisions of public benefit programs are a frequently overlooked source of funding for career supports. Many consumers are concerned that a loss of public benefits might accompany an increase in earnings. Both the SSI and APTD programs have provisions whereby employment-related expenses can be paid by the recipient and then deducted in the calculation of benefits. The most important of these programs is the Social Security Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS Plan). Transportation, as one example, is a service that does not always have to be reimbursed through a developmental service funding source but can often be purchased by an employee with no decrease in income for the employee.

Plan for full conversion. Partial conversion, whereby an agency operates a supported employment program and also continues to operate a sheltered facility, results in a doubling of many expenses and a scattering of scarce resources. For example, someone still has to be paid to bring in subcontract work for the sheltered facility.

Managers successful at introducing innovations learn to commit a "critical mass" of organizational resources to do the job right (Delbeque & Mills, 1986). The "in-between" point ~ where most agencies are now - tends to be the most expensive.

What do We Do with Our Facility?

Many agencies have invested heavily over the years in facilities and equipment to provide sheltered employment. These agencies are now faced with the problem known to economists as "sunk costs" ~ capital that cannot easily be divested. Related to this is the fact that production income has become an important income source for these agencies.

Agencies should take a hard look at their operations and determine to what extent production resources are indeed assets. Some organizations may conclude that the costs of rent or mortgage payments and upkeep on buildings and grounds, the purchase and maintenance of equipment and the cost of production personnel are not justified by the revenue produced.

An inherent tension between the production and the rehabilitation functions has accompanied the sheltered workshop model since its inception. And while a few agencies of having achieved a happy medium, most resolve the tension in one direction or the other, by placing a greater emphasis on the rehabilitation function or on the production function. It will as a rule be most advantageous for an agency to "go all the way" in one direction or the other. Those with a rehabilitation emphasis will often find that it is much more efficient to leave business decisions and investments to the people who are best at them - community businesspeople - and stick to their particular expertise: training, support and career assistance for job-seekers with disabilities. However, there are situations in which valuable production assets have been developed and can be a viable business.

Sell, lease or barter assets. Buildings, grounds, and equipment can be sold or leased and thereby transformed into "liquid capital" to fund the cost of conversion to supported employment. One agency subdivided its sheltered facility into several sections, and as employees left for jobs, rented out the sections one by one to other businesses. Eventually a small supported employment office remained in what was once the front office of the workshop and the organization had a steady source of income from its tenants.

Alternatively, assets can be traded for job opportunities. For example, one agency arranged with a local florist for the use of its greenhouse in return for two job positions.

Spin-off small businesses. Some aspects of a production operation may indeed have viable business potential. The guiding principle should be: would this business stand on its own feet without human-service-related income? If the answer is yes, then it can be established as a separate and probably for-profit corporation and, as jobs turn-over and business grows, the business can employ both disabled and nondisabled employees.

Market specialized production and business expertise. Expertise in particular occupational areas or production skills is a type of "human capital" which can be put to effective use in the conversion process. Expertise in job design and work methods, job analysis, knowledge about employee supervision and training, design of employee evaluation systems, and so forth, are all valuable assets needed by the business community. These assets can be offered as direct support to the agency's job-seekers with disabilities. Another possible strategy is to market this expertise to the business community to create income for a supported employment program.

How Can We Find Enough Jobs for Everybody?

It may seem an insurmountable task at first to find satisfactory places in the open labor market for a number of people who had until recently been considered unemployable outside of special settings. Many of these workers have no non-sheltered work history or experience in occupational areas with relevance to the real world.

In addressing these problems, it is important to recognize the obligation this places on us to design vocational services so that these same problems - lack of meaningful skills and community experiences ~ do not continue to confront us in the future. Several useful suggestions can be offered.

Diffuse job-finding responsibility. In a good supported employment program, every member of the organization is a job developer. Rather than centralizing the task of employer contacts with one or two individuals, every member of the organization should have the skills and the responsibility to assist in the job-finding and employment negotiation process. An agency in one state divided all of its clients among all of the staff, including the Executive Director, Receptionist, and so forth, ~ about a 1:3 ratio - and assigned each staff member to help three individuals find and keep a job in the community. Board members have a role to play in this effort as well through their connections and contacts.

Develop a comprehensive marketing plan. A marketing approach is based on analyzing and meeting the needs of "your other clients," the business community. Marketing functions include analyzing consumer demand, segmentation of markets by variables such as company size and location, analyzing competing sources of supply and development of a specific product definition for the agency (Como and Hagner, 1986). The actual process of selling to businesses, often confused with marketing, is only one aspect of a marketing program. Many agencies use surveys, business advisory councils and participation in business organizations as marketing tools and significantly improve their job development capability.

What Happens when Workers are Between Jobs?

The problems that result from instabilities in the community job market are perhaps the single most widely mentioned problem in connection with full conversion to supported

employment. Some people will inevitably be between jobs some of the time. To a lesser extent, the fact that the work schedules of supported jobs tend to be more varied than those of sheltered jobs can also pose difficulties for transportation, residential assistance, and so forth. After all, one of purposes of sheltered settings was as a "place to go" for set hours each day.

It is important to remember that work fluctuation problems were never in any way resolved in sheltered settings, only masked by make work, down time, counseling sessions, and "featherbedding," ~ spreading out work to more people for a longer time than is really warranted.

Those who have experienced conversion have noted that the problem is much less than was feared. Good supported employment practices can accommodate those difficulties that do arise.

Expect and plan for career development. Very few of us will remain at the same job indefinitely. This is even more true the younger one is and the more entry-level one's job is. Vocational service providers need to plan for an ongoing series of job changes, notice signs of "burn-out" or dissatisfaction, and not be caught off guard when someone loses or quits a job.

Develop flexible arrangements with "host companies". Some agencies cultivate relationships with a few employers who are flexible enough to host short-term try outs, temporary positions and flexible scheduling arrangements for employees. Employees between jobs or needing a second part-time job can move into one of these flexible job positions on a temporary basis.

Utilize community leisure resources. Assisting an individual to become involved in volunteer or recreational pursuits (outside of work hours) can have a number of benefits. These activities are an important aspect of community integration and participation in themselves. Leisure or volunteer pursuits can also be used to fill a gap in a person's daily schedule or expand to cover a larger part of the day if an individual finds him or herself between jobs for a time. Memberships in clubs, groups, and other informal associations are also a good source of new job leads. Case managers and vocational agency staff can combine their efforts to develop resources for leisure involvement.

Will Some Employees Refuse Community Employment?

A common belief is that sheltered employees (or families on their behalf) will refuse to accept jobs in the community. It is true that some fear ridicule and ostracism outside of sheltered settings, and others have formed friendships in their present work setting that they wish to maintain. The response to these concerns is a matter of agency approach and style.

Accommodate individual concerns. Nine times out of ten a specific request or need is behind an individual's reluctance to try a community job. When we take the time to find out what is behind an individual resistance, it may well be something that can be accommodated in supported employment. One individual, for example, was used to a daily exercise routine and thought he would have to give that up. Staff arranged for this individual to join a community health club and arranged a daily schedule that included both an exercise class and a supported job. Some families may be comfortable with an employer nearer to an individual's home or with whom the family has some acquaintance, either as a customer of the business or through some personal connection, but not with a totally unfamiliar employer. Supported employment should not be a service model that is imposed on people, but an opportunity for individual choice and expression.

Disseminate information. Sheltered workshops have the advantage of being a visible, tangible and immediate option, while supported employment may seem a theoretical or vague idea to people who have not yet participated in it. Information about individual job possibilities should be presented in as concrete a way as possible. Visits to work settings to meet employers, co-workers, and possibly former co-workers or classmates of an employee with a disability, are all excellent ways to present information about community employment. Former employees of a facility can be invited as guest presenters; their stories can be told via meetings, newsletters, and so forth.

Develop no-obligation try-outs. At first, a person's information about community jobs will be abstract and vague, whereas their information about sheltered work will be concrete and vivid. Obviously, this is not a good foundation for an informed decision. Agencies often start by setting up short non-threatening try-outs in the community for people. The vast majority of those who have tried these experiences prefer them to sheltered work.

Facilitate continuation of friendships. People changing work settings should be assisted to identify and stay in touch with their friends. (It is also important to help people realize that remaining in a workshop is no guarantee of seeing one's friends because they may leave.) Continuation of friendships can also be considered in job development. Two people can work within easy walking distance of one another and meet for lunch, for example. Relationships can also be utilized as an educational tool; one person explaining to his or her friends what it's like on their new job.

What About Job-seekers with the Most Severe Disabilities?

Underlying supported employment is what can be called the presumption of employability (McGloughlin, Garner & Callahan, 1987). That is, we assume that anyone who wants to can be employed in the community. It is important to understand that "less disabled" or "higher functioning" does not necessarily mean "better matched to the job." Each situation is unique. Organizations which have had the most trouble have been those which attempted to place those with the less severe disabilities first. Those which have experience in helping

people with very severe disabilities obtain employment describe it as not harder, just different.

Seek out sources of technical assistance. Idealists can forget that some things are worth doing but very difficult to do. It is not a failure or a weakness to require assistance in solving the challenges that some people pose. This is when we realize that we are all, in some sense, supported employees. The provision of "release time" for staff to visit other programs is an especially effective strategy. Several resources for help with conversion problems are included as an Appendix at the end of this manual.

Develop disability-neutral selection policies. Organizations which adopt - consciously or unconsciously - a strategy of attempting to start the conversion process with people who are presumed to be less severely disabled seem to have a great deal of trouble adapting to the different needs of different workers and can easily fall into the temptation to give up and "blame" those with more severe disabilities for their lack of success. This can be dealt with by starting with a commitment to a disability-neutral selection policy. Disability-neutral strategies for selection of employees to receive supported employment services include : (a) by order of entrance into the agency, (b) by order of response to a questionnaire asking about interest in the program, or (c) by the order in which Individual Service Plan revisions occur. A strategy to avoid is what is sometimes known as "backfilling," admitting new people into a sheltered facility, thereby assuring that some future agency personnel will have to deal with these conversion issues all over again. Only individual supported jobs should be developed for each new person accepted for services.

Conclusion

There is no doubt about it: The obstacles confronting an agency in the process of converting to supported employment are real and significant. The idea of assisting people to obtain employment in natural, integrated settings and providing whatever support services they need in order to be successful, seems perfectly obvious and simple. Yet implementation of this idea has required massive, almost revolutionary change in organizational structures, funding mechanisms, professional preparation and consumer, family and employer expectations. We should not be surprised that a great deal of hard work is involved. That so much has been achieved in so short a time is what is surprising.

Two years of conversion initiatives have identified a number of ideas and suggestions which may be useful in varying degrees to agencies struggling with the conversion process. Some will be more useful than others in a specific situation. But it is important to treat these ideas and suggestions as no more than cumulative tips from others in the field. There is no one way or one best way to approach conversion. If technical assistance and training efforts have taught us anything, it is that each agency and situation is unique.

Nor can service agencies be expected to bear the full burden of conversion by themselves, in isolation from the larger policy issues of interagency cooperation, regulatory reform and service funding. Efforts are required at all levels to insure that we build on our past accomplishments. As Turnbull and Turnbull (1988) noted, most of us on either side of the service system continue to work in "sheltered workshops," separated from the possibilities of sharing our work and our lives with people of differing abilities and characteristics. Our vision for the final decade of the century must include the removal of barriers to true integration, the expansion of opportunities for full community membership, and the conversion to services which support people working together.

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APPENDIX

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT RESOURCES

Div of Vocational Rehabilitation Vocational Rehabilitation Systems Change Project 78 Regional Drive, Bldg JB Concord, NH 03301	Mike Nichols Robert Kram Rosemary Locher	603/271-3471
University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability Morrill Hall Durham, NH 03824	Jan Nisbet Stephanie Powers Patty Cotton	603/862-4320
Developmental Disabilities Council The Concord Center Ten Ferry Street, Suite 315 Concord, NH 03301	David Hagner Louise Hackett	603/271-3236
Training Resource Network 20 Beech Street Keene, NH 03431	Dale DiLeo	603/357-1791

SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT CONSULTANTS

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DL Networks	Dawn Langton	603/357-1791
Work Opportunities Unltd	Donna Mailhot	603/224-9938
Joanne Malloy, Consultant	Joanne Malloy	603/529-1531
CHESCO	Joan Mauro	603/357-3915
Career Designs	Kim Milliken	603/357-9390
Transition	Patsy O'Brien	603/524-5855
ETI	Gail Peterson	603/669-0986
Employment Associates	Nancy Whitley	603/889-6233