Employment is considered an important facet for community inclusion and greater quality of life. For Persons with Intellectual Disabilities (PWIDs), it promotes self-reliance and independence. Furthermore, the productive community participation for PWIDs and the respect accorded to them is enhanced. The Singapore Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) – Enabling Master Plan 2007-2011 aims to work towards a vision for an inclusive society where persons with disabilities are integrated and embraced as equal citizens of our society. The plan proposed the decentralization of efforts to specific disability groups to focus on disability-specific needs and capabilities to better match industry specific training and support for employers.

In early 2010, Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS) was chosen to pilot this special programme to provide job placement and job support to persons with intellectual disability in open employment. Efforts have been put in place for a systematic framework of assessment, job placement, on-the-job training and support to facilitate the employment of PWIDs in the open market. During the phases of job placement and job support, the team faced challenges such as parental co-operation on job matching, clients’ interests and motivation to work, expectations of the employers, etc.

We allow our clients to pursue what is most meaningful for him/her by providing choices of jobs and enquiring about their personal interests prior to job-matching to achieve utmost satisfaction of our clients as well as employers.

The paper will provide the information on training prospective clients for successful job placements, the various challenges faced and clients’ experiences by using case examples.

**Literature Review:**

Work is important for people with disabilities, and fosters their career development and quality of life. Findings from social cognitive theory suggested that transition to work and work inclusion processes should be based on opportunities to explore the world of work, awareness of professional options (of which people with an intellectual disability (ID) frequently have little knowledge), and consideration of career interests and self-efficacy beliefs.

Supported Employment has sometimes been called the “place, train and maintain” model of vocational rehabilitation. The same task can be done in many different ways across different workplaces. Workplaces differ in a myriad of small ways. The social demands of real workplaces can often be as important as the jobs themselves. They can differ between jobs, and are difficult to replicate in day or training centres. All these potential differences make the transition to open
employment difficult for people with a learning disability. For this reason, placement in an ordinary job is seen not as an end-point but a necessary first step in successful training, the supported employee being taught a specific job task, in a specific work place, and usually by a skilled job trainer or job coach.

Task training for people with a substantial learning disability commonly involves breaking tasks down into component steps and the use of a prompting hierarchy by the trainer to give just enough information for the person to do the job without creating dependency. Task training and support to cope with the social aspects of work are ideally reduced over time to levels consistent with monitoring, but with the supported employment service continuing to maintain a problem-solving and career development brief for the individual. Descriptions of the supported employment process vary in the number of key stages required (Wehman & Kregal, 1985; Trach & Rusch, 1989; O’Bryan & O’Brien, 1995; BASE, 2008), but they can be usefully summarised under five main headings: Vocational Profiling, Job Finding, Job Analysis and placement, Job Training and Follow-along services.

Recently, the term “Customised Employment” has been used to described the individualised techniques of supported employment but blended with some of the techniques taken from person-centred planning (National Center on Workforce and Disability, 2005; O’Bryan, 2008). To an extent, Customised Employment has been coined to re-state the relationship between successful employment outcomes for substantially disabled people and a well-described, necessary set of steps, aligned with a positive philosophy of what people can achieve with appropriate support.

Much of the research on supported employment has been carried out in the United States of America (USA), mainly because the model was developed in the USA. The supported employment entitlement was also enshrined in law and its roll-out across the USA was supported through research and development contracts with a wide range of Universities. Research on supported employment in the United Kingdom (UK) is less common because the later start point for supported employment in the UK, the lack of a defined and funded supported employment model, and the associated lack of commissioned research. Supported employment has also developed slowly in Europe, and the availability of research on it suffers from similar issues to those in the UK.

For many years in the USA, people with learning disabilities were served within a continuum model of employment rehabilitation. This stretched from day centres, work units, sheltered workshops and transitional programmes and represented a progressive skill teaching model where people were to move between services as their skills improved. Progression rates were, however, very poor and the whole system came under criticism (Whitehead, 1979).

Test and Wood (1997) provided a summary of systematic instruction which stemmed from applied behaviour analysis, and was based on the earlier research discussed here. They discussed how the skills of prompting, chaining and shaping tasks, reinforcing and giving feedback to workers, and fading to leave them independent are applied in the workplace by a job coach.

Severity of disability appeared to be inversely correlated with success in achieving employment and associated outcomes such as wage levels and work integration (Mank et al. 1997a and b, 1998 and 1999).
Beyer et al. (1996) found that in a sample of 2446 supported employees in the UK, 90% of the employees who had learning disabilities, 65.8% of the workers placed were men and 34.2% were women. Lacey (2006) noted that volunteering was assumed to be helpful in getting a paid job, but said: “There is however only limited research evidence to support all of this. Most studies identified are based on specific sections of the population, namely job seekers who are refugees, or members of deprived urban or rural communities. The evidence is anecdotal with much of it directed to what helped or hindered access to employment with little information on where they get jobs.”

Work experience while at school has been shown to improve students’ self-esteem, to promote learning of workplace culture and what is expected, and to develop ideas for future job searches (Hoerner & Wehrley, 1995; Bailey & Hughes, 1999; Wehman, 2001).

Research suggests a number of elements of work experience programmes that help ensure quality outcomes (Benz & Lindstrom, 1997; Haimson & Bellotti, 2001; Hoerner & Wehrley, 1995):

- Clear program goals
- Clear roles and responsibilities for worksite staffs
- Clear, individualized training plans
- Good links between students, schools, and employers
- On-the-job learning
- A range of work-based learning opportunities
- Mentoring available in the workplace
- Clear expectations and feedback
- Assessments to identify skills, interests, and support needs
- Reinforcement of work-based learning outside of work
- Appropriate academic, social, and administrative support all partners

Rusch and Braddock (2004) noted that, despite the evidence on outcomes, segregated services continue to outpace the growth of supported employment, such that the growth of supported employment had all but stalled by 2000. They recommended diverting staff and resources at transition age to allow schools to coordinate post-placement follow-up for three years following employment or enrolment in post-secondary education.

**Job retention**

There is considerable divergence in the literature about the proportion of clients achieving successful employment in community jobs. However, some schemes have reported retention figures as low as 20% (Goldberg et al., 1990). Within the New York area, a study of people with intellectual and psychiatric disability considered employment outcomes following a three-month employment-training programme and of those who entered employment (109), 28% worked for between 12 and 24 months (Botuck & Levy, 1998). A large proportion (77%) changed jobs at least once during the study period either through their own choice (21%), due to redundancy (35%), termination for absenteeism, behavioural problems or inadequate skills (37%). The majority of people who lost their jobs, did so within the first six months of employment (Lagomarcino, 2002).

The reasons for failed employment have been addressed by Jauss et al. (1994). They argued that it was necessary to adopt an analytical approach to identifying potential problems. In particular, a placement will fail on the part of
the worker due to either problems with skills or motivation and it is therefore necessary to observe the worker and
determine strategies for remedying the problem.

In a retrospective study, Lemaire and Mallik (2008) examined supported employment barriers for 112 adults with mild
to moderate learning disabilities. Inattention, interpersonal, and behavioral problems were frequent barriers (37.5%)
to maintaining employment. Poor attendance, inadequate work quality, or interpersonal problems were responsible for
20.8% of involuntary employment terminations. The authors concluded that an understanding of work-related issues
for people with learning disabilities may assist support staff, such as nurses, to better address the psychosocial needs of
this population.

Chadsey-Rusch et al. (1997) have indicated that, generally, there are agreement between clients, employers and job
coaches as to what constitutes appropriate social integration outcomes and which interventions can facilitate these
outcomes.

Kilsby et al. (1996) have shown that, within the UK, levels of social interaction within day centres were greater than
within a supported employment setting with interaction being predominantly task related. They also found that within
the supported employment setting there was a greater level of joking that was considered to be a positive indication
of social acceptance. Beyer et al. (1995) found that when people with learning disabilities moved from traditional day
centres into supported employment, their pattern of interaction changed in the balance between work and social talk,
and in frequency of interaction, become more like those observed among their non-disabled colleagues than people
with learning disabilities as observed in day centres. The content of people’s interaction was different. Supported
workers were being directed to do things by other workers at nearly double the rate of non-disabled colleagues.
Supported workers were also found to receive superficial interactions such as praises and greetings, more frequently
than colleagues (Beyer et al. 1995).

Rusch et al. (1994) found no significant difference between workers with learning disabilities and their co-workers
in eight of nine different indices of a Co-worker Involvement Index: Physical integration, social integration, training,
associating (frequency), associating (appropriateness), advocating, evaluating, and giving information. The only item
where there was a significant difference was in befriending which involved socialising outside the workplace.

In a study of those with severe levels of mental retardation, Rusch et al. (1995) found that using the Co-worker
Involvement Index described above, the worker with severe mental retardation were significantly less likely to receive
training or be given information from their peers when compared with their non-disabled co-workers. They were also
less likely to develop friendships with their co-workers outside their place of work.

Chadsey-Rusch (1992) identified inadequate social skills as a major cause of job loss for the population with
intellectual disability. The lack of definition of what constitute social skills has hampered research into methods of
improving them. Chadsey-Rusch believes that they are:

1. Goal oriented
2. Rule-governed learned behaviours
3. Dependent on context
4. Involve observable and non-observable cognitive and affective elements
5. Assist in eliciting positive responses and avoiding negative responses
Support in the job

Longitudinal observation of clients within a supported employment program revealed that there was a trend for reduced contact between the client and their training advisor over time. This fading of support underpins a move for the individual to independence within the job, and underpins any reduction in cost of the supported employment model over time. This can be demonstrated as a ratio of hours employed to contact hours over time.

Botuck et al. (1992) showed that in the initial three month period of employment, contact with the employee was 35%. However, this fell over subsequent periods to 9% and 5.5%. There was, however, considerable variation between individual employees with contact in the initial period ranging from between 2 hours and 395 hours.

It takes longer to develop jobs for clients with severe intellectual disability. In a study in North and South Dakota, clients with profound mental retardation required an average of 512 hours per job whilst those with moderate mental retardation required 120 hours and those with mild mental retardation only 72 hours (1993). They provided a model to estimate the number of hours needed to implement supported employment for people with a range of learning disabilities. They estimated that input for people with moderate learning disability fell from 100% direct support to 50% after 20 weeks, and to a maintenance of around 5% after 40 weeks. For people with mild learning disability, input fell quicker to 50% after 4 weeks, 29% after 12 weeks, and to the maintenance level after 32 weeks.

Challenges faced:

Many of the clients in the open employment now were previously placed in sheltered workshops and some social enterprises, and have undergone vocational training.

Being as a Job Placement Officer (JPO) in the Job Placement Job Support (JPJS) team, there were various challenges faced while trying to place out our potential clients. These challenges include parental co-operation on job matching, client’s interest and motivation to work,

expectations of employers and supervisors, comprehension level of our clients at work, cooperation from our clients and speed, productivity and quality of work.

Cooperation from both our clients and their parents are vital. It is also important that our clients are interested and motivated to work in the jobs that they are matched with. The speed, productivity, and quality of work of our clients may not meet the expectations of the employers. We will then seek the understanding of the employers to provide ample time for our clients to adapt and catch up with the job requirements.

When clients lose interest and motivation to work, they are most likely to exhibit negative work behaviours, for example, refusing to carry out supervisor’s instructions or work cooperatively with others, or even not doing work but playing. In the event of such, the Allied Health Professionals team which includes Occupational therapist, Psychologist will be alerted immediately and the team will work together to implement guidelines for the client to adhere to.

The support service includes the modification of the workplace (designing the comfortable physical layout of the jobsite), identify and minimize the hazard at the work place to enhance the health and safety of the clients at
workplace, identify or designing the assistive or adaptive devices that enhance the safety of the client and also to enhance the productivity and quality of work. The team also provides on-going counseling at the job to motivate the clients at work, social and assertiveness skills training at workplace.

Providing choices of work at all times tends to have a higher success rate in terms of the sustainability rather than do a prescription of the work for the client. So, the client interest needs to be explored in depth before the process of job matching.

Here are two illustrations of training plans implemented for Clients A and B.

An intervention plan with one of the clients (Client A) which involved the use of visual aids to teach a new skill was implemented. These visual aids were developed specific to his tasks and were used as pictorial references for the client to self-check himself, especially when in the absence of the Job Placement Officer. The tasks were broken down into simpler sequential steps for better comprehension and pictures were also provided for every step of the task. Visuals are always very effective in this case.

For example, one of the difficulties faced by Client A was the steps to opening the combination lock. With a simple pictorial guide and steps broken down taught to him, he was able to manage the lock by the third day of his work, with much practice and following the guide which was pasted onto his locker.

On the other hand, with reference to this, we also faced challenges with clients who were cognitively unable to apprehend the usage of the combination lock.

We closely worked with the employer, supervisor and co-worker to work on the implementation of the strategy and we made it into success with all their supports.

Moving on to client B, she began work at a highly recognized factory producing wet towels. She was a Production Packer manually packing wet towels, who then moved on to be handling administrative duties. Some of her administrative duties involved basic photocopying of materials, sorting invoices and topping up of stationeries. She was re-trained due to the change in her job scopes. With the adequate training provided, she adapted to her role in a very short duration.

To assist our clients in managing their time well, the team came up with a daily schedule whereby the client would be able to self-check and self-refer. The daily schedule included the different tasks that he/she needs to do, sequencing of the levels and also the estimated time that he/she needs to completes the task.

The team will always provide on-going support for a period of six months which includes on the first week, the JPO provides intensive on the job training for 3 to 5 days, followed by once a week support for the first two months. For the period of 3rd and 4th month, the JPO will provide support once fortnightly and in 5th and 6th month, the JPO provides follow up at least once a month. However, the intensity of the job support may increase which depends on the needs such as behavioural support needs, motivational issues, re-designing of the tasks, additional job scope, and e.t.c.
Conclusion:

In conclusion, Job Placement Job Support programme is a pilot programme for PWIDs in Singapore. There are various challenges were faced during the programme and it is very important that support of the clients and the stakeholders, which include the management, professional team members, employers, parents/ caregivers, are given as they are highly needed to place the potential clients in the open job market and to sustain their employment.

REFERENCES


- British Association for Supported Employment (BASE) Definition of Supported Employment. http://www.base-uk.org/about_se/definitions.htm


• Mank, D., Cioffi, A. and Yovanoff, P. *(1999). Impact of Co-worker Involvement with Supported Employees on Wage and Integration Outcomes. Mental Retardation, 37, 5, 383-394


• The key to school-to-work transition. New York, NY: Glencoe/McGraw–Hill.


