

An Analysis of the Activities of Employment Specialist in a Natural Support Approach to Supported Employment

By Darlene Unger, Wendy Parent, Karen Gibson, Kelly Kane-Johnston, & John Kregel

Abstract

The use of natural supports during supported employment service delivery has emerged as a widespread practice of supported employment providers. Though a number of strategies for using natural supports have evolved, evidence is clearly limited which describes the role of the employment specialist or other non-traditional support resources, such as family members, friends, and coworkers when natural supports are utilized during supported employment. This investigation focuses on the activities of a supported employment program's initial efforts to document the activities of employment specialists and other non-traditional support providers when an emphasis is placed on using community and workplace supports during the provision of supported employment.

Since its inception as a federal/state vocational rehabilitation program with the 1986 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act (P.L. 99-506), supported employment has afforded an increasing number of individuals with severe disabilities, previously believed to be unemployable, an opportunity to enter and compete in our nation's work force. The national number of persons participating in supported employment programs has risen from 90,000 in 1991 to 140,000 in 1995 (Wehman, Revell, & Kregel, 1997). Traditionally, the "job coach model" of supported employment (e.g., Wehman & Kregel, 1985; Rusch, 1986) was the primary means through which individuals with significant disabilities were able to participate and succeed in competitive employment.

In the Job Coach model, a job coach or employment specialist was the individual primarily responsible for providing consumer assessment, job development, job placement, job-site training, and on-going follow along services to the individual for the duration of his or her employment. A distinguishing characteristic of the job coach model is that the employment specialist provided individualized assistance to the person with a disability during each of these components of supported employment. In providing individualized assistance within the employment setting, the employment specialist did whatever was necessary to train the individual as efficiently and effectively as possible to perform the required job duties. Often-times, this meant relying on the assistance and expertise of workplace personnel, as well as physical and auditory cues existing in the work environment to provide support to the employee.

The idea of using supports which exist within the employment setting to assist individuals with disabilities in participating in community-based employment settings predates the introduction of the concept of natural supports in professional literature (Nisbet & Hagner, 1988). Several rehabilitation professionals alluded to the idea of using coworkers or employer supports to provide assistance to a person with a disability in order for an individual to consistently and successfully perform the required duties of his or her job (e.g., Rusch & Menchetti, 1981; Shafer, 1986; Wehman, 1981). Additionally, early supported employment job coach training manuals proposed the idea of utilizing coworkers and supervisors to provide training or ongoing assistance to an individual (e.g., Moon, Goodall, Barcus, & Brooke, 1986).

In the job coach model of supported employment, one of the primary roles of the employment specialist is to train the individual to perform the job and then systematically fade his or her presence from the job-site after

the individual has learned to do the job. When the idea of using natural supports initially emerged, it was presented as an independent alternative to the traditional job-coach model of supported employment. The rationales provided for advancing the use of natural supports were to improve the integration and employment retention of individuals with disabilities in competitive employment (Nisbet & Hagner, 1988). As the concept of using natural supports evolved and natural support strategies were implemented, other rehabilitation professionals also purported that the presence of an employment specialist might actually impede the social integration of persons with disabilities in the employment environment (i.e., Fabian & Luecking, 1991; Hagner, 1992; Hagner, Rogan & Murphy, 1992). In efforts to remedy this situation, many professionals viewed natural support strategies as a viable alternative to the more "traditional" job coach model of supported employment.

Even though a lack of consensus exists in the field regarding the definition of natural supports and what is or is not a natural support, it is evident that natural supports are being widely utilized. The concept of natural supports has assisted in fostering a variety of strategies to provide support to a person with a disability (e.g., Butterworth, Whitney-Thomas, & Shaw, 1997; DiLeo, Leucking & Hathaway, 1995; Fabian, Edelman, & Leedy, 1993; Hagner, Butterworth & Keith, 1995; Parent, Unger, Gibson, & Clements, 1994). With the development and implementation of these natural support strategies, it is unclear as to what the role of the employment specialist should be in assisting an individual with a significant disability in obtaining and ultimately succeeding in the work environments of his or her choice. Further, if natural supports are being utilized, then what is the type of natural supports provided and who is providing it? Empirical evidence which documents the use and effectiveness of natural supports has only recently begun to emerge and is extremely limited in scope. For example, in a recent national study of supported employment providers, more than 85% of the provider agencies indicated that they utilize natural supports during the delivery of supported employment services (West, Kregel, Hernandez, & Hock, 1997). Results from the same study indicated that natural supports were predominately used during the job-site training and extended services component of supported employment.

Mank and colleagues (1996a; 1996b) investigated the degree of typical employment features and natural supports experienced by supported employment participants in comparison to coworkers and the effect which is had on employment outcomes such as wages, benefits, length of employment, and integration. Overall, the research indicated that the more typical the employment of individuals with disabilities the more likely they are to realize better wage and social integration outcomes.

Professional literature suggests that the role of the employment specialist when using a natural supports approach is to serve as a consultant or facilitator to the employer by building on supports which exist in the workplace, as well as the expertise of the employer (Fabian & Luecking, 1991; Fabian, et al, 1993; Hagner, Rogan, & Murphy, 1992; Rogan, Hagner, & Murphy, 1993). However, empirical evidence which describes the role of the employment specialist when natural supports are utilized is lacking.

In a recent study, Butterworth and colleagues (1997) describe specific strategies used by employment training specialists (ETS) to facilitate natural supports and social integration at the work-site. They reported that the role of the ETS shifts from one of providing direct instruction to the employee with disabilities to facilitating problem solving and consultation with the employee, coworkers, and supervisor. Their research also reported positive correlations between the level of ETS investment in facilitating natural supports and the level of workplace supports and inclusion for the young adults placed into competitive employment.

While it is clear that there is more than a passing interest in the use of natural supports to provide assistance to a person with a disability, evidence is clearly limited which describes the types of support provided by the employment specialist or other non-traditional support resources, such as family members, friends, coworkers, teachers and volunteers when a natural supports approach to supported employment is implemented. The purpose of this manuscript is to describe supports needed or desired by supported

employment participants, the type of supports utilized, and the role of the employment specialist in addressing support needs when a natural support strategy is implemented.

Since 1992, the Natural Supports Demonstration Project at Virginia Commonwealth University's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment has developed and implemented a natural supports approach for achieving competitive employment outcomes for transition age youth with significant disabilities. The seven-step Community and Workplace model (Parent, Unger, Gibson, & Clements, 1994) which incorporates the use of natural supports, individual choice and self-determination into the existing supported employment service delivery system was implemented with all persons placed into supported competitive employment by project employment specialists. Individuals were referred to the project by parents, rehabilitation counselors, and special education teachers. Participants were representative of a variety of disability labels and resided in rural, urban and suburban geographical areas which surround a Southeastern metropolitan city.

Community and Workplace Support Model

The Community and Workplace Support Model (Table 1) relies on the assistance of individuals or other support mechanisms (e.g., assistive technology, compensatory strategies, job modifications, personal assistant services, etc.) to assist an individual with participating in the community and work environments of his or her choice (Parent, et al., 1994). Potential supports are not limited to agencies, organizations and persons who provide services for persons with disabilities. Instead, all agencies and organizations located in one's community which provide services and assistance to the general population are investigated to determine what type of support they might potentially offer and how individuals can access their services. Examples of these organizations and the type of support offered include: the local office of the state employment commission for assistance in identifying job openings, determining job skills and interests, and developing a resume; the adult literacy council for assistance in completing employment applications and developing a resume; and volunteers from local schools, colleges, and universities to provide assistance with getting individuals ready for work and providing transportation.

Table 1 - Community and Workplace Support Model

1. Determine individuals needs and preferences
2. Brainstorm potential options
3. Assess job and community supports
4. Identify individual choices
5. Develop strategies for accessing supports
6. Evaluate support effectiveness
7. Arrange provision for on-going monitoring

The Community and Workplace Support Model and the Job Coach Model

The Community and Workplace Support model is not intended to be an alternative approach to the job-coach model (see Wehman & Kregel, 1985) of providing supported employment services. Instead, the support model is infused into all aspects of services delivery and should be implemented for every support need which arises during the supported employment service delivery process. For example, individuals may require assistance in determining what types of jobs or careers they wish to pursue, finding a job, arranging transportation, managing their money, addressing concerns regarding social security benefits, and securing necessary attire for work. Using the Community and Workplace Support approach, the employment specialist works with the individual and significant persons in his or her life, to determine support needs and preferences; brainstorm potential options; assess job and community supports; identify individual choices; develop strategies for accessing supports; evaluate effectiveness of support; and arrange provisions for ongoing monitoring for every support need identified during the supported employment process.

What is a Support Need?

Individual support needs are considered to be any type of assistance required or desired by an individual which aids or facilitates participation in the community and workplace environments of his or her choice. Support needs may be identified by the individual, significant persons in his or her life, employers, or coworkers. The employment specialist may respond to an individual's support need by (1) identifying potential sources of support or assistance, (2) arranging for the support selected by the individual to be provided or (3) providing the support him or her self. For example, an individual who required transportation to and from work, was able to choose from having a coworker transport him, having his job coach train him to take the bus or taxi, and walk. In some instances, the employment specialist assisted in arranging for the individual to use or access the support such as the taxi or the bus. In other instances, the employer arranged for a coworker to transport the individual and the employment specialist was not involved in arranging the support. The level and extent to which the employment specialist is involved in arranging and providing support will be contingent on the desires of the individual and the identification of support resources. The employment specialist is always available to assist should the need arise. However, the focus of the Community and Workplace Support Model is on identifying and utilizing supports which exist in the individual's life, community, and employment setting to provide assistance to a person with a disability based on the individual's preferences.

By incorporating the use of the Community and Workplace Support Model into supported employment service delivery, a variety of support options were identified and developed to address each individual's specific support needs. For example: an individual who needed assistance in knowing when to take breaks and when to return to work was able to choose from (1) a coworker or supervisor prompting him, (2) wearing a watch with multiple alarms which was preprogrammed to "beep" at the times when he needed to break and then return to work, or (3) taking breaks according to the natural cues in the work environment, such as when he had completed specific tasks or when coworkers were taking their meals. Similarly, an individual needing assistance in getting up and ready for work was able to choose from (1) setting two alarm clocks, (2) having a member of the residential staff wake him up, (3) having his neighbor knock on the door, or (4) having a friend or employment specialist call him in the morning.

Best Practices in Supported Employment

The Community and Workplace Support Model incorporates the "best practices" of supported employment as advanced by Brooke and colleagues (1997) including: consumer control of the employment process; opportunities for the consumer to make informed choices; early identification of long term supports; emphasis

on the use of community and business supports; and utilization of a person-centered planning approach. The Community and Workplace Support model provides individuals with disabilities opportunities to make informed choices regarding: the type of jobs or careers they might like to pursue; the type and level of assistance they would like to receive; how to learn how to perform the job; and how and when to advance in their career. For instance, individuals can select who they want to assist them to find a job, remember how to do the job, request time off from work, and address any other support needs that arise. Parent, Unger, Gibson, and Clements (1994) have described the specific natural support strategies utilized in the Community and Workplace support model in greater detail.

Sample

Consumer Characteristics

Table 2 on the following page contains demographic characteristics of individuals placed into competitive employment by the VCU-RRTC Natural Supports Transition Project staff from June of 1992 to November of 1996, utilizing the community and workplace support model. The thirty-six individuals served by project staff represented a heterogeneous group of individuals across gender, race, and primary disability label. Even though individuals with a primary disability of mental retardation represented almost half (47%) of the persons placed through the activities of the projects, 47% of these individuals also had a secondary disability. In addition to serving young adults with traumatic brain injury and young adults with mental illness, individuals with disability labels of autism, cerebral palsy, learning disability or spinal bifida comprise the individuals included in the "other" category. The mean age of participants at the time of referral was 23 years old. Information on individual's race, and the percentage of individuals previously employed competitively is also contained in Table 2.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using the Community and Workplace Support form developed by the VCU-RRTC Natural Supports Project staff. The initial draft of the form was developed with assistance from the projects' advisory committee which consisted of individuals with disabilities, parents, rehabilitation counselors, educators, employment specialists, advocates, employers and community representatives. It was field tested with participants in the pilot study of the Natural Supports Demonstration Project for the purpose of insuring the form's clarity and the potential for capturing necessary information. During the field test, feedback was obtained from employment specialists administering the form, individuals with disabilities and family members, regarding the clarity of the instrument. Based on their input, the instrument was modified and then reviewed by the projects' advisory committee and rehabilitation professionals familiar with natural support strategies.

Content of the Community and Workplace Form

The final version of the nine page Community and Workplace Support Form consists of several forced choice type questions (see table 3 on the following page). The purpose of the form is to identify the type of support needed or desired by an individual, the supports which were utilized by the individual in meeting his or her support needs, and the type of assistance provided by the employment specialist in addressing the individual's support needs.

Table 2 - Participant Demographic Characteristics (n = 36)

	Frequency	Percentage
Mean Age = 23.27 years (range: 20 to 38 years)		
Male	23	64%
Woman	13	36%
Asian	1	3%
Black	9	25%
Hispanic	1	3%
Caucasian	25	69%
Mental Retardation	17	47%
Traumatic Brain Injury	6	17%
Mental Illness	9	25%
Other	4	11%
Percentage Previously Competitively Employed:		
Mental Retardation	23%	
Traumatic Brain Injury	50%	
Mental Illness	78%	
Other	75%	

Table 3 - Community and Workplace Support Form Questions

<p>What type of support is needed or desired? What support resources have been identified to address this need? What type of support option has been selected? Who has primary responsibility for arranging or accessing the support? Who is the primary person responsible for providing the support? What has been the role of the employment specialist in addressing this support need? Are any costs associated with providing the support? Who is primarily responsible for overseeing the on-going monitoring of the support?</p>

Unit of Analysis

Support needs can be defined as any type of assistance required or desired by an individual which aids or facilitates participation in community and employment environments. Learning how to do the job, obtaining transportation to and from work, remembering how to complete all required job duties, socializing with coworkers, addressing Social Security issues, and picking up and cashing a paycheck are all examples of support needs. They are identified any time assistance might be needed or when obstacles are encountered which may impede or limit participation in these environments. Support needs may be identified by the employment specialist or communicated to the employment specialist by the individual or anyone involved in his or her life, such as one's family members or friends, employer or coworkers, and/or teacher.

Procedures

The Community and Workplace Support Form was completed by an employment specialist every time a support need was identified for an individual throughout the supported employment process. The employment specialists were trained by the director of the Natural Supports Project in data collection and various monitoring devices were implemented to insure accuracy and timeliness of form completion. During the training period, employment specialists were trained to an average integrator agreement of .90. Data were also collected on demographic and historical information for individual and employment outcomes, such as wages earned, hours worked, and job retention using forms previously developed by the RRTC for the Supported Employment Information System (SEIS)(Kregel, Wehman, Revell, & Hill, 1990). All data were reviewed for completeness and congruence with previously entered data and the project data management specialist reconciled discrepancies through direct contact with the employment specialist who completed the instrument. Statistical Analysis System Software (SAS Institute, 1986) was used for data analysis.

Employment Characteristics

Overall, 36 individuals with severe disabilities were placed in a total of 54 different jobs. The fifty-four different job placements is representative of an individual who held two or more jobs, simultaneously (n=1); individuals who chose to resign from their first job to pursue career advancement opportunities or employment in a different occupational environment (n=7); and individuals who resigned or were terminated from their job (n=10). Mean number of job placements, cumulative mean hourly wage per placement, cumulative mean hours worked per week, and employment retention information were calculated for participants grouped by primary disability label (See Table 4 on the following page). Individuals with traumatic brain injury as a primary disability label earned slightly more per hour (\$5.44) and worked a greater number of hours per work (25.1) in comparison to participants with mental retardation (\$4.81;20.66 hours), mental illness (\$5.02;23.4 hours) and individuals with other disability labels (\$4.66; 23.7 hours).

The employment retention ratio was calculated using the procedure developed by Wehman and colleagues (1989) as a measure of vocational progress and length of time an individual was employed. The ratio is determined by dividing the number of months an individual was employed, (beginning at the date of first job placement and continuing either to the current date or the date of discharge from the project, regardless of the number of job placements) by the total possible months that he or she would have had an opportunity to be employed. The mean employment retention ratio for each disability category were reported to vary from a low of .73 (young adults comprising the "other" category) to a high of .87 (young adults with mental retardation) among the four categories of disability. The group mean

Table 4 - Employment Information

Primary Disability Label	Mean Number of Job Placements	Cumulative Mean Hourly Wage Per Placement	Cumulative Mean hours worked Per Week	Retention (range .17 to 1)
Mental Retardation (n = 17)	1.29 (n = 22)	\$4.81	20.66	.87
Traumatic Brain Injury (n = 6)	1.67 (n = 10)	\$5.44	25.1	.82
Mental Illness (n = 9)	1.78 (n = 16)	\$5.02	23.4	.77
Other (n = 4)	1.5 (n = 6)	\$4.66	23.67	.73
TOTAL (n = 36)	1.5	\$4.98	23.1	.82

of .82 indicates that during the total possible time individuals could have been employed beginning with their first job placement, they were gainfully employed 82% of the total time until either the current date or the date of discharge from the project (See table 4).

Type of Supports Needed or Desired by Individuals

Support needs can be defined as any type of assistance required or desired by an individual which aids or facilitates participation in community and employment environments. Learning how to do the job, transportation to and from work, signing in and out of work, remembering how to complete all required job duties, getting along with coworkers and picking up and cashing a paycheck are all examples of support needs. A support need can be identified at any time during the supported employment process. For the 36 individuals placed into competitive employment by the VCU-RRTC Natural Supports Project, a total of 57 different support needs were identified. Additionally, individuals often expressed a need for a number of the 57 different support needs more than once, as the total number of supports needed or desired were reported to be 590 during the span of 40 months. For example, an individual who was presently employed expressed a need to work at a different job but was unsure of what other types of employment he would like to pursue or how he might go about finding a different job. Upon referral to the project, one of the initial support needs he identified was finding a job. Once this support need was satisfied by securing a job and working for an extended period of time, he decided he wanted to make a career change and pursue a different type of job. Needing assistance with this, his "new" support needs were identifying what type of job he might like to have and then once determined, securing that job.

Additionally, individual support needs oftentimes may have arisen more than once because the type of support provided or the person providing the support was no longer available to provide support, such as the need for transportation when a coworker who provided transportation was no longer going to be employed at the same business location. Other instances in which a support need might arise again include situations which: (1) the support might be too costly; or (2) the support was not successful; or (3) the support did not meet the needs of the individual.

Each of the 57 different support needs as designated on the Community and Workplace Support Form were assigned into one of six categories: 1) finding a job; 2) learning how to do the job; 3) assistance with completing the job; 4) addressing work-related issues; 5) addressing nonworking-related issues; and 6) transportation. Descriptions of the specific types of support needs defined under the six category headings, as

well as group frequencies can be found in Table 5 on the following page. As the data contained in the table reflects, the most prevalent support needs of young adults were in the area of addressing work-related issues (28%). Examples of support needs which were encompassed by this category include: an individual with a traumatic brain injury who required assistance with getting from the entrance of a large discount retail store to his work station in the stock and receiving area in the back of the store each time he reported to work; or an individual who worked in a fast food franchise needed assistance with alternations for her uniform.

Addressing nonworking-related issues (23%), finding a job (17%), and learning how to do the job (15%) ranked second, third, and fourth, respectively in the types of support or assistance needed or desired by individuals. Assistance with addressing nonworking-related issues included such needs as addressing social security concerns, locating a place to live, managing one's finances, meeting people outside of work, and furthering one's education and/or training. In finding a job, individuals often indicated a need for assistance in determining what type of job they would like to have, or what working in specific jobs or businesses would involve, as well as securing employment. Assistance with learning how to do one's job, and assistance with completing the job, represented less than one-fourth of the total support needs indicated by participants. In contrast, over one-half (51%) of the support needs reported by young adults with severe disabilities were in the areas of addressing work-related and nonworking related issues.

Identifying and Arranging Sources of Support

Even though a support might "naturally" occur in an employment or community setting or be readily available, it did not necessarily mean that the individual could access the support. For example, in arranging the support, an employment specialist, parent or family member, friend or other designated individuals assist the young adult with a disability in locating and securing the desired support in order for the individual to receive assistance. The persons responsible for arranging the support assists the individual with a disability in choosing among different types of supports as well as evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of each type of support. The person does not necessarily provide the support, but instead insures that the individual with a disability can access the support if it is needed.

The data indicate that when an individual's support need falls in the area of addressing work-related issues, finding a job, or assistance with completing the job, the employment specialist has the primary responsibility for arranging the support (See table 6). For instance, an employment specialist might arrange to have a teacher, parent or family member obtain employment applications at businesses of interest to the individual or perhaps a teacher, parent or family member can drop off an individual's resume, which was prepared by a volunteer from the Local Adult Literacy Council.

Table 5 - Types of Support Needs (n = 590)

Consumer Support Needs	Frequency	Percentage
Finding a Job: Support needed which assists individuals in determining job choices, developing a resume, finding a job, and/or finding a different or second job	102	17%
Learning How to Do the Job: Support needed which assists individuals with learning how to do the job, remembering how to do the job, and becoming oriented around the workplace	90	15%
Assistance with Completing the Job: Support needed to assist individuals in completing all the required job duties within the time allotted on a daily basis.	32	5%

Addressing Work-Related Issues: Support needed to address issues which might arise at the employment setting or circumstances in which the absence of support might adversely affect one's employment situation. Examples include: getting up and ready for work; addressing fatigue or stamina issues on the job; getting along with coworkers; arranging work-schedule and hours; signing in and out for work; calling in sick or late for work; and changing something about the job; and managing challenging behaviors at the work-site.	168	28%
Addressing Nonwork-Related Issues: Support needed away from the job-site such as developing friendships, meeting people outside of work, pursuing recreational opportunities, locating a place to live, using money and making purchases, handling Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) issues, and taking care of personal hygiene and grooming issues	137	23%
Arranging Transportation: Support needed to assist individuals in finding transportation to and from work, obtaining a learners permit or driver's license, accessing and learning how to use public transportation, accessing specialized transportation, and making ride arrangements with coworkers, volunteers, and friends or family members	61	10%

The data indicates that individuals relied heavily on the employment specialist to arrange supports for many types of support needs (See table 6 on the following page). However, for non-work related issues, a number of the individuals preferred to arrange the support on their own (23.1%) or have a parent or family member arrange supports (39.9%). Additionally, workplace personnel were most frequently cited by individuals as having the responsibility for arranging supports in learning how to do the job. Thus, when arranging support needs which involved locating a place to live, picking up and cashing a paycheck, participating in social and recreational functions, or handling legal issues, individuals clearly desired to have a family member or someone close to them arrange the support. In contrast, when learning how to do the job, the individuals preferred to have coworkers or supervisors arrange the support required.

Often times, the support option selected required a systematic strategy for implementation with someone primarily responsible for arranging the support and linking the individual with a disability up with the support provider or support strategy. For example, when addressing work-related issues, such as managing challenging behaviors, or signing in and out of work, the employment specialist would work collaboratively with the individual and employer to identify potential support options within the workplace. After supports were identified, the individual would then be presented with a variety of options to choose from. Once the support was selected, and agreed upon by all parties involved, the employment specialist would then arrange for the support to be provided.

If, in the instance of managing challenging behaviors, the support chosen was for the individual was to approach an identified coworker to discuss things which were bothering him, then the employment specialist might arrange with the employer and the individual for this to occur. If the support agreed upon for signing in and out of work was to have a coworker "punch" the individual's time card, the employment specialist was often-times the person responsible for facilitating this support by identifying coworkers and developing a backup plan for these types of work related supports. In all instances, the employment specialist's role was not necessarily to provide the support (punch in for the individual), but instead to arrange the support so that the individual could systematically access supports which were both desirable and feasible for all persons involved.

Support Providers

Supervisor and Other Workplace Personnel

If one of the roles of the employment specialist was linking the individual to the support or to the support provider then who were the individuals actually providing the support? Once an individual is employed, assistance is predominantly provided by supervisors and other work-place personnel. As illustrated in Table 7 on the following page, supervisors and coworkers were actively involved when the individual required support in learning how to do one's job (76%), or complete the duties required of the position (51%), and, to a lesser extent when support was needed in addressing work-related issues (34%).

Employment Specialist

The employment specialist was rarely designated as the primary provider of support when an individual's need was identified as learning how to do the job, assistance with completing the job, or addressing work-related issues. Further, in looking only at job site training, the employment specialist was designated as the primary means of support in only 8% of the instances when support was required for learning how to do the job. In contrast, the employment specialist was primarily responsible for providing support when assistance was needed in finding a job. The data indicates that employment specialists are relied on to a

Table 6 - Identifying and Arranging Supports (n = 590)

	Consumer	Parent/Family Member	Employment Specialist	Other Human Services Personnel/Teacher	Workplace Personnel
Finding a Job n = (116)	34 (29.3%)	9 (7.8%)	67 (57.8%)	6 (5.2%)	0 (0%)
Learning How to do the Job n = (66)	7 (10.6%)	0 (0%)	26 (39.4%)	3 (4.5%)	30 (45.5%)
Assistance with Completing the Job n = (57)	12 (21.1%)	0 (0%)	28 (49.1%)	0 (0%)	17 (29.8%)
Addressing Work-Related Issues n = (160)	60 (37.5%)	13 (8.1%)	73 (45.6%)	1 (.6%)	13 (8.1%)
Arranging Transportation n = (58)	24 (41.4%)	21 (36.2%)	11 (19.0%)	2 (3.4%)	0 (0%)

Table 7 - Support Providers (n = 590)

Type of Support Needed	Consumer	Supervisor	Other Workplace Personnel	Parent/Family Member/Friend/Neighbor	School Personnel, Other Human Services Personnel, Volunteers	Employment Specialist
Finding a Job n = 113	29 (25.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (.9%)	12 (10.6%)	13 (11.5%)	58 (51.3%)
Learning How to do the Job n = 66	4 (6.1%)	26 (39.4%)	24 (36.4%)	0 (0%)	3 (2.7%)	9 (8.0%)

Assistance with Completing the Job n = 51	16 (31.4%)	13 (25.5%)	13 (25.5%)	0 (0%)	9 (0%)	9 (17.6%)
Addressing Work-Related Issues n = 150	49 (32.7%)	40 (26.7%)	11 (7.3%)	30 (20.0%)	7 (4.7%)	13 (8.7%)
Address Nonwork-Related Issues n = 141	24 (17.0%)	6 (4.3%)	5 (3.5%)	57 (40.4%)	39 (27.7%)	10 (7.1%)
Arranging Transportation n = 56	16 (28.6%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.6%)	23 (41.1%)	11 (19.6%)	4 (7.1%)

greater extent than other support persons in the identification and securing of employment for persons with disabilities. Minimal support was provided by family members, friends, school personnel, or other human services personnel in determining employment choices and locating job opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Individual Support

In some instances, the individual was responsible for providing his or her own support in locating employment and identifying job choices. For example, individuals were provided with instructions on how to identify "help wanted" signs in businesses which they frequented as well as pick up employment applications and drop off their resume with the employment specialist's business card attached to it at prospective employers. Other situations where the individual provided his or her own support in finding a job, include reviewing the classifieds with the assistance of a family member or friend and then calling the employment specialist to let him or her know of an interest in certain positions.

Family Members and Friends

In the area of addressing work-related issues, family members, friends and neighbors were also a primary means of support to young adults with disabilities. For example, an individual working in a hot environment desired to take periodic water breaks. The individual's family member worked with workplace personnel to insure that it was all right for the individual to take short breaks at designated times throughout the day. The individual, after completing a certain amount of this job tasks, would take the breaks if he felt he needed to with no assistance from coworkers or supervisors.

Individuals also preferred to have someone close to them, such as a parent, family member or friend, to provide support in addressing non-work related issues such as managing money and paying bills, meeting people outside of work and monitoring medical issues. In approximately 40% of the instances in which addressing nonworking-related issues were cited as a support need, parents, family members, friends or neighbors were utilized as primary support providers.

Role of Employment Specialists in Utilizing a Natural Supports Strategy During Supported Employment

Table 8 on the following page indicates the specific type of assistance provided by employment specialists

implementing the Community and Workplace Support Model to young adults with significant disabilities. In less than 25% of the instances when support was needed, the employment specialist's role was to directly provide the support. If employment specialists were not providing direct support to individuals, then what role did employment specialists play in ensuring that individuals were successful in their jobs and that both the individual and the employer were satisfied with the employment relationship?

In addition to providing support, these data indicate that employment specialists engage in a variety of activities when a natural supports strategy is implemented. For approximately three-fourths of the 590 support needs identified for individuals, the employment specialist was responsible for identifying support options (72%). Identifying support options involved the employment specialist working with the individual, his or her family, friends, employer, and other significant persons in his or her life to determine potential sources of assistance or support.

Additionally, in more than one-half of the 590 total support needs, the employment specialist provided additional support to individuals if needed (52%), and shared information with individuals and the employer (50%). Examples of these types of assistance include: an employment specialist stepping in to provide job-site training because the coworker was pulled away when a fellow employee called in sick; the employment specialist making recommendations to a coworker providing the training who had difficulty increasing the individual's work speed; the employment specialist negotiating with the employer because the individual wanted to work different hours so she could spend time with her family on weekends; and an employment specialist suggesting that the employer purchase a plastic container which was divided into sections so the employee could keep all of her condiments separate and which would expedite her restocking all condiment stations at a restaurant.

Table 8 - Role of the Employment Specialist

Role of Employment Specialist	Frequency/Percentage of Response
1. Identify support options	422 (71.5%)
2. Provide additional support if needed	309 (52.4%)
3. Share information/resources	296 (50.2%)
4. Advocating	274 (46.4%)
5. Assist consumer with choosing type of support	210 (25.6%)
6. Help consumer access the support	207 (35.1%)
7. Contact support resources	186 (31.5%)
8. Work with consumer and support provider	136 (23.1%)
9. On-going monitoring of support	132 (22.4%)
10. Providing the support	115 (19.5%)
11. Oversee the support arrangement	83 (14.1%)
12. Train the person providing the support	30 (5.1%)
13. Making support arrangements	19 (3.2%)
14. Employment specialist not involved	17 (2.9%)
15. Making alternative arrangements	2 (0.3%)
16. Other	
* Respondents could check more than one type of assistance	

This paper presents the results of the first empirical study which catalogs the kinds of activities employment specialists engage in when a supported employment program emphasizes the use of community and

workplace supports during supported employment service delivery. Additionally, a description of the support needs, as well as individuals who arranged and provided supports to young adults with severe disabilities receiving supported employment services is provided.

Due to the uniqueness of the Community and Workplace Support Model, as well as the variety of natural support strategies which exist in the field of supported employment these findings may have limited generalization. Though the results are limited to one supported employment program which utilized the Community and Work-place Support Model for an extended time period, several interesting findings regarding the role of employment specialists, and other support providers are revealed.

Young Adults Have a Variety of Support Needs

The results of this study have demonstrated that young adults with significant disabilities have a variety of support needs in obtaining and maintaining employment. These data indicate that individuals' support needs are not limited to finding a job and learning how to do the job but additionally, individuals have numerous support needs which arise during all phases of supported employment. Individuals have multiple support needs after they become employed, such as learning how to do the job, addressing work-related and non-work related issues, and arranging transportation.

When are Natural Supports Utilized?

The data also emphasizes the employment specialists' efforts to utilize natural supports during all phases of the supported employment process. This is especially encouraging in light of the results of the national research study conducted by West and colleagues (1997). In a study of 385 supported employment programs nationwide, they found that supported employment providers predominately utilize natural supports when teaching the person to do the job and during the provision of ongoing monitoring and support for their consumers. The use of natural supports during consumer assessment, job development and job placement activities is reported far less frequently.

These data imply that the employment specialist may need to devote additional time in the beginning of the supported employment process in order to get to know the individual, assess the individual's abilities, and identify potential sources of support in the individual's life and community, prior to job development. Because employment specialists are most often relied on to identify and arrange supports or assistance, knowledge of the specific types of community and work place supports available to any citizen or employee is critical. Employment specialists must be able to assess individual's needs and then communicate and negotiate with prospective support providers for the purpose of securing the type and level of support needed or desired.

Who Provides Support?

The findings reported above verify that a number of persons provide support to individuals in obtaining and maintaining employment, including: family members, neighbors, friends, school personnel, employment specialists, supervisors and other workplace personnel. The data provides evidence that when young adults are able to choose the type of support they would like to have they predominantly select the employment specialist to assist them in finding a job and to considerably lesser extent providing assistance with completing the job and learning how to do the job. Even though employment specialists are arranging supports to assist individuals in finding jobs, the data also demonstrates that employment specialists provide the most direct assistance to individuals during job development when a natural supports strategy is implemented. One possible explanation for this is that young adults want certain types of jobs or request to work in certain types

of businesses. Oftentimes, positions and jobs within these highly specialized or popular businesses have to be negotiated. Natural support providers, such as parents or family members, are often apprehensive or feel it is inappropriate to approach a prospective employer.

In all other support need categories the predominate providers of support are supervisors or workplace personnel, family members, friends, or the individual. Parents, family members, neighbors, and friends are often relied on to arrange transportation and address nonworking-related issues. Supervisors and other workplace personnel are the primary providers of support in learning how to do the job, providing assistance with completing the job and addressing work-related issues.

The fact that employment specialist are not directly responsible for teaching the person the job or providing transportation does not mean that employment specialists have an abundant amount of time on their hands and that they can serve more people on their caseloads. Employment specialists may still be devoting the same amount of time in working with individuals to secure and maintain employment, but the type of assistance they are providing has evolved from always being the primary provider of support to that of identifying, facilitating, and ensuring that supports which are selected by the individual are meeting his or her needs.

Role of the Employment Specialist

In addressing the variety of support needs of young adults, and the providers of support, the data reflects the idea that the role of the employment specialist evolves from that of being the primary provider of services to that of a facilitator of services in arranging supports for individuals to access. In almost three-fourths of the total support needs, one of the primary roles of the employment specialist was to identify potential support options. Additionally, in over one-half of the support needs, the role of the employment specialist was to share information and resources. The results of this study have demonstrated that employment specialists must not only be knowledgeable about a variety of support options available both in the work setting and in the community, but also be able to develop and secure the desired support which can assist young adults with significant disabilities in maximizing their full career potential. The data implies that employment specialist must function more in a consultant role as they work collaboratively with employers, family, friends, community members, and educators to capitalize on existing supports in addition to creatively developing supports which meet each individual's unique needs.

The data indicates that in less than one-fourth of the total support needs of individuals the employment specialist's role was to provide the support. However, this does not mean that the employment specialist was not involved in arranging, facilitating or overseeing the support arrangement. The second most cited role of the employment specialist was that of providing additional support if needed. These results imply that even though the employment specialist may not be the person providing the support, it does not necessarily relieve the employment specialist from the responsibilities that the "natural support" is providing or free the employment specialist to complete other activities. It is only after all parties are satisfied and the employment specialist has evaluated whether the support is serving its intended purposes, that the employment specialist can begin to focus on different activities.

The use of natural supports is pervasive in supported employment. However, not much is known about what an employment specialist does when natural supports are used. The results of this study provide an initial description of the role of employment specialists and other support providers when a supported employment program emphasizes the use of community and workplace supports during supported employment. As noted by Test and Wood (1996) there is a need for much more natural support research. They explain:

"Because there is so little experimental research designed to determine functional variables within supported employment as a whole, it is not surprising that none exist within the area of natural supports strategies. Unfortunately, the lack of this type of research leaves supported employment vulnerable to anyone who calls what he or she is doing "supported employment". In other words, if someone says he or she is doing supported employment, then it must be supported employment. This same situation can be applied to natural supports strategies. Additional research on natural supports strategies and related outcomes is clearly needed..." p. 170.

References

- Brooke, V., Inge, K. J., Armstrong, A. J., & Wehman, P. (1997). Supported employment handbook: A customer-driven approach for persons with significant disabilities. Richmond, VA: Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment.
- Butterworth, J., Whitney-Thomas, J., & Shaw, D. (1997). The changing role of community based instruction: Strategies for facilitation workplace supports. Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 8, 9-20.
- DiLeo, D., Luecking, R., & Hathaway, S. (1995). Natural supports in action: Strategies to facilitate employer supports of workers with disabilities. St. Augustine, FL: Training Resource Network, Inc.
- Fabian, E. S., Edelman, A., & Leedy, M. (1993). Linking workers with severe disabilities to social supports in the workplace: Strategies for addressing barriers. Journal of Rehabilitation, 59, 29-34.
- Fabian, E. S., & Luecking, R. (1991). Doing it the company way: Using internal company supports in the workplace. Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling, 22(2), 32-35.
- Hagner, D. C. (1992). The social interactions and job supports of supported employees. In J. Nisbet (Ed.), Natural supports in school, at work, and in the community for people with severe disabilities (pp. 217-239).
- Hagner, D., Butterworth, J. & Keith, G. (1995). Strategies and barriers in facilitation natural supports for employment of adults with severe disabilities. Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 20 (2), 110-120.
- Hagner, D., Rogan, P., & Murphy, S. (1993). Facilitating natural supports in the workplace: Strategies for support consultants. Journal of Rehabilitation, 58 (1), 29-34.
- Mank, D., Cioffi, A., & Yovanoff, P. (1996a). The consequences of compromise: An analysis of natural supports, features of supported employment jobs and their relationship to wage and integration outcomes. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Mank, D., Cioffi, A., & Yovanoff, P. (1996b). Patterns of support for employees with severe disabilities. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Moon, M. S., Goodall, P., Barcus, M., & Brooke, V. (1986). The supported work model of competitive

employment for citizens with severe handicaps: A guide for job trainers. Richmond, VA: Virginia Commonwealth University, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center.

Nisbet, J., & Hagner, D. (1988). Natural supports in the workplace: A reexamination of supported employment. Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 13, 260-267.

Parent, W., Unger, D., Gibson, K., & Clements, C. (1994). The role of the job coach: Orchestrating community and workplace supports. American Rehabilitation, 20(3), 2-11.

Rogan, P., Hagner, D., & Murphy, S. (1992). Natural supports: Reconceptualizing job coach roles. Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 18, 275-281.

Rusch, F. (1986). Competitive employment issues and strategies. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

Rusch, F., & Menchetti, B. (1981). Increasing compliant work behaviors in a non-sheltered work setting. Mental Retardation, 19, 107-111.

Test, D. W., & Wood, W. M. (1996). Natural supports in the workplace: The jury is still out. Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 18, 275-281.

Wehman, P. (1981). Competitive employment. Baltimore, MD: Paul Brooks Publishing Co.

Wehman, P., & Kregel, J. (1985). A supported work approach to competitive employment of individuals with moderate and severe handicaps. Journal of the Association of Persons with Severe Handicaps, 10(1), 3-9.

Wehman, P., Kreutzer, J., West, M., Sherron, P., Diambra, J., Fry, R., Groah, C., Sale, P., & Killiam, S. (1989). Employment outcomes of person following traumatic brain injury: Pre-injury, post-injury, and supported employment. Brain Injury, 3(4), 397-412.

Wehman, P., Revell, G., & Kregel, J. (1997). Supported employment from 1986-1995: A decade of progress. In P. Wehman, J. Kregel, & M. West, (Eds.) Promises fulfilled: Assessing the effectiveness of national efforts to improve supported employment outcomes. Richmond, VA: Virginia Commonwealth University, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment.

West, M. & Kregel, J., Hernandez, A., Hock, T. (1997). Use of natural supports in supported employment: A view from the field. In P. Wehman, J. Kregel, & M. West, (Eds.) Promises fulfilled: Assessing the effectiveness of national efforts to improve supported employment outcomes. Richmond, VA: Virginia Commonwealth University, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment.