

Disability and Rehabilitation Research Project on CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT

Customized Employment Case Study #2

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Introduction

Discovery is the foundation of customized employment (CE), and is one of the elements that differentiates CE from other employment interventions. The purpose is to learn about the individual's strengths, interests and work preferences. Discovery is capacity-based, not deficit-based. Instead of conducting formal assessments, employment specialists spend time with job seekers in familiar and unfamiliar settings. Employment specialists also talk with people who know the job seekers and learn what is important to them. This includes learning about the challenging aspects of their lives and how these challenges can be overcome with support. Discovery is an essential and critical step before job negotiation and employment.

Virginia Commonwealth University's Disability Rehabilitation Research Project on Customized Employment (VCU-DRRP) is researching the impact of customized employment on the employment outcomes of individuals with disabilities. The study is in partnership with TransCen, Inc., and transition-age youth are being assisted in finding customized jobs of choice. This case study provides details on how one young woman was assisted in finding her job using customized employment.

Sarah's Case Study

"Sarah" graduated from high school at age 21 and transitioned into a career services community-based work experiences for its students. Sarah and her family learned about the opportunity to receive customized employment services and consented to participate in the study.

The employment specialist first met Sarah at home to talk about what she enjoys and her interest in working. During the home visit, the employment specialist discovered that Sarah's week is packed with activities. She is involved with a live art performance group and interns at a local business that was arranged through the career services program that she attends. When asked what she enjoys doing, Sarah said that she spends time with her dog, dancing, singing, going to the gym, and cooking with her mother occasionally.

During the home visit, Sarah said she enjoyed some of her activities more than others. Her work experiences included working with a vet tech, a childcare center, and several hospitality experiences, including working one-on-one with an executive chef at a food production company. Her mother went into detail explaining that Sarah didn't care for the childcare setting at all. She explained that Sarah started her hospitality experience with a group of classmates through the career services program but quickly stood out to the company during the experience with her bubbly personality. An individual internship at Performance Food Group was offered to her based on her enthusiasm during the group experience. The mother reported that Sarah showed the most interest in hospitality, and the employment specialist noticed that Sarah's face "lit up" with agreement as she listened to her mother talk.

After the home visit, the next step was to complete discovery activities to learn more about Sarah's interests, skills, and work preferences. To accomplish this, the employment specialist talked with Sarah and her mother about activities that would take place in familiar as well as unfamiliar settings. The first discovery activity took place at her career academy program's hospitality class where the employment specialist felt she would be the most comfortable. Sarah was very engaged following the instructor's directions and handing out materials for the whole class. She was eager to answer questions and volunteered to demonstrate for her classmates.

The next discovery activity took place in an unfamiliar setting. Sarah's mother had told the employment specialist that she really enjoys smoothies. With this in mind, the employment specialist identified a local business that had smoothies on the menu. The plan was to do an enjoyable activity during which Sarah could relax and get to know the employment specialist who would be assisting her in finding a customized job.

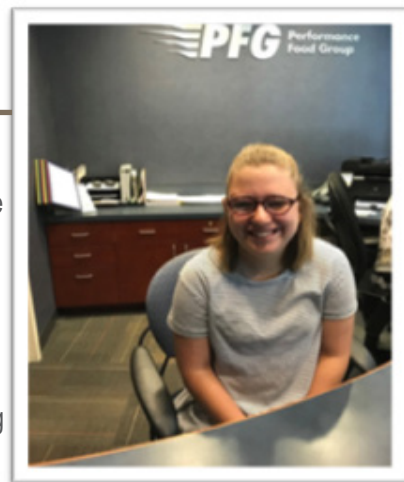
During the trip, the employment specialist and Sarah observed the workers behind the counter preparing the smoothies, stocking the shelves with inventory, and interacting with their customers. She remained very attentive to what was going on around her and seemed to enjoy chatting over some fruity smoothies. Sarah told the employment specialist that the favorite part of her internship was the people. She also said that she gets to stay active during her shift being on her feet the whole time. The experience reinforced her emerging vocational theme around hospitality.



Performance Food Group

With the information learned so far, the employment specialist decided to observe Sarah in her internship setting at Performance Food Group. With the go-ahead from Sarah, her mom, and the manager; the employment specialist observed Sarah informally across a two week period of time. The purpose of observing and talking with Sarah at the Performance Food Group was for her to accept the employment specialist in a familiar environment where Sarah felt comfortable while learning about her skills and interests.

During the two weeks, the employment specialist observed her on six different occasions for approximately two hours each. The employment specialist spoke with the coworker who was assisting Sarah to learn her work tasks to see how the business was supporting her. Sarah needed very little prompting to orient within the building. The coworker helped Sarah stay focused, and he showed her how each task was done step by step. These tasks included stocking the café/breakroom, pickup and stamping outgoing mail, and delivering FedEx packages. The employment specialist noticed she was very comfortable with her coworkers. She also noticed that Sarah liked getting to know where everyone sits when doing the FedEx and mail run, finding each name on the employees' offices. The employment specialist saw a big part of Sarah's success at the internship as the natural supports provided by the business.



Sarah's Negotiated Position

After seeing how successful and comfortable Sarah was in this internship, the employment specialist began to consider how she could negotiate a job for her there. During the observations, the employment specialist talked with the coworker about the role of an employment specialist, and how she could provide training and assistance to Sarah so that she could be more independent in her job duties. If Sarah received job site training, the coworker would not have to provide constant supervision, which was taking her away from him away from his own job duties. This was very appealing to the business that was very invested in her and were impressed with her work and personality. They wanted Sarah to be a successful and become an independent worker. After several conversations with the employment specialist, the manager worked with HR to customize a position for her within the Performance Food Group.



Sarah was hired to work Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday for 9 hours a week earning \$12 an hour. During the initial training, the employment specialist provided the coworkers with Sarah's job duty schedule. Sarah uses the schedule to check off each task as she completes it providing her a transition to the next job duty. She has gradually added job duties as she has become more independent including greeting visitors and answering calls at the receptionist desk. This added task based on her communication skills and enthusiastic personality made her a perfect fit for this job duty. Her job duties will continue to grow. At this time, the employment specialist is fading her support to the natural supports of the business. Sarah continues to show the company her hard work and dedication.

Background Information

VCU's Disability Rehabilitation Research Project on Customized Employment (VCU-DRRP) is researching the impact of customized employment on the employment outcomes of individuals with autism and/or intellectual disabilities. The random control trial study is in partnership with TransCen, Inc., and transition-age youth are being assisted in finding customized jobs of choice. The study is being conducted by two teams: one at VCU in Richmond, VA and one in Milwaukee, WI at Creative Employment Opportunities (CEO). Youth between the ages of 18 and 24 are being recruited to participate and are being randomly assigned to either the customized employment intervention or a control group. The control group are continuing their services as usual. At the close of the study, the employment outcomes achieved by the two groups of participants will be compared.

Acknowledgements

This case study presents one of the customized employment participants from Richmond, Virginia. The VCU-DRRP would like to thank "Sarah" for sharing her story and for the support of the Performance Food Group. If you have questions about this case study or about the VCU DRRP on Customized Employment, please contact:

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