

Disability and Rehabilitation Research Project on CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT

Customized Employment Case Study #1

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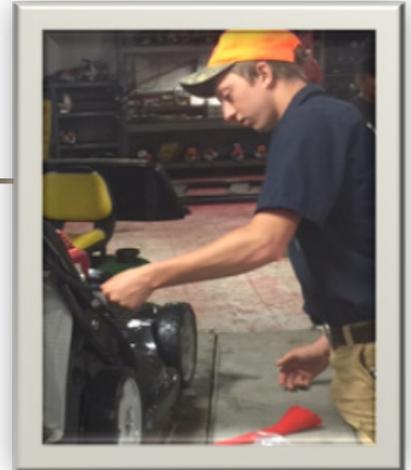
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Introduction

The first step in delivering customized employment services is conducting Discovery to build rapport with and to get to know the job seeker. The focus is on the person's strengths and interests as well as work preferences. Traditional assessments are replaced with qualitative interviewing and observations in the community. Job seekers are assisted in refining and identifying their interests for employment, and a position is negotiated that meets the person's needs as well as a business need. Of critical importance is negotiating positions specific to job seekers' interests and not trying to "fit" individuals into positions that are available. Trying to "fit" individuals with disabilities into existing positions has often excluded them from achieving integrated competitive employment outcomes. This case study provides details on how one young man was assisted in finding his customized position.

Dan's Case Study

When the employment specialist first met Dan, she immediately noticed that he was wearing a John Deere ball cap, Carhart pants, and a camouflage sweatshirt. During the initial home visit, the employment specialist learned that he enjoys working outside in construction, lawn care, and working on cars. He reported fixing up an old family truck, which is now his, as well as lawn mowers and other electronics at home with his Dad. Other things that the employment specialist learned about Dan were that he loves to be outdoors fishing and snowmobiling. From the home visit, it was clear that Dan likes to use his hands building, fixing, and creating things.



His first job shadow experience was at a car dealership. The employment specialist observed that Dan was very interested in watching the mechanics but did not show any interest related to sales or doing clerical tasks. When he was in the garage, he was engaged in conversation with the mechanics the entire time! However, when Dan was in the office/sales area, he did not pay attention to anything going on around him and only wanted to look at the cars. Dan's team described his job preferences as "anything where it smells [like] oil and gasoline and [he] gets to tinker with small engines!"

Armed with information, the next step was to conduct informational interviews in community businesses that matched Dan's interests and skills. The employment specialist identified a local car dealership that was a short distance down the road from Dan's house. A meeting with the garage manager was arranged as well as a tour of the main work space in the garage. Dan did a great job asking questions about the dealership. Some of the questions that he asked included the following. "Do you have someone who wipes down the cars in the lot when it rains?" "What do you like best about working here?"

The manager explained to Dan that working with the customers and making them satisfied was the best! However, it could also be the most stressful if they were not happy with the work done on their vehicle. Matt also told Dan that they did not have someone who wiped down the cars when it rained, because the cars were previously treated with a wax that diminishes spotting. Dan said that working in a garage, with a group of guys, being around cars, engines, tires, and dirt would be a great place to be employed!

After this informational interview, the employment specialist attempted to set up a work experience for Dan at the car dealership. Unfortunately, due to "red tape" from the corporate office, this could not be arranged. Sometimes, negotiating customized employment in larger companies is difficult, because it is tough to reach the decision makers.

Dan's Negotiated Position



At that point, Dan's mom suggested the employment specialist check out a small business specializing in power equipment sales and repairs, Esch Power Equipment. Dan often goes to this store to get help with his own maintenance questions and repairs. CEO made the connection, and set up a tour and informational interview of the store. Enter Kevin and Christine Mifflin.

The visit to **Esch Power Equipment**, a family owned business for 54 years, started off similar to the job shadow at the car dealership. Dan's eyes widened as he entered the store, and the employment specialist even asked him if he liked the smell of the place. His response was an enthusiastic, "Yes!" While on our tour of the store, Dan again asked similar questions about likes and dislikes of working there. Kevin was excited

to show him around explaining that he enjoyed the relationship with his long-standing customers. Dan had the chance to watch over one of the mechanics shoulders as they worked on a difficult tractor issue.

The showroom at Esch was filled with tractors to be sold, and they were visibly quite dusty and dirty. Seeing this, the employment specialist asked who cleaned up in the showroom? Kevin commented that his elderly father-in-law did at one time, but he hadn't been there in about 1 ½ years. The employment specialist asked Dan to explain his 'side jobs' to Kevin doing snow removal and tree cutting. Approximately one week later, the employment specialist contacted Kevin and set up an opportunity for Dan to go in and perform some tasks at the store to demonstrate his competencies. Dan wowed Kevin by immaculately cleaning 10 large tractors in an hour. Christine, Kevin's wife, was there too and was equally impressed by how thorough and hardworking Dan was. Kevin wanted to hire Dan on the spot!

Following the work experience, a time for Dan was selected for him to fill out the hiring paperwork. The employment specialist presented a job proposal that outlined tasks and the supports that work best for Dan to be successful. Kevin and Christine were very appreciative of the proposal, and Esch Power Equipment hired Dan to work 11 hours per week at \$8.00 an hour. The goal is for him to increase hours as Dan's experience at the store increases. Esch Power Equipment hired an individual based on his strengths and knew how those strengths would help in the operation and success of their store.

Dan has been successfully placed in a truly customized position where his employer and coworkers provide the natural supports necessary for his success. Recently, Christine commented, "Dan is such a hard worker, and takes direction so well. We have him putting together the push mowers now! Not only do the showroom tractors shine, but Kevin has an extra set of hands that he knows he can put to work, and trust."

Last week Dan's mom called to tell the employment specialist a few things. "Thank you for listening to me when I suggested Esch Equipment and following through. Kevin gave Dan a sweatshirt from the store, and he didn't take it off all day. Dan was so excited [when] he took in the weed Wacker to get some help repairing the string. When he got home, and I asked him what it cost, he said, 'nothing, I work there now.' He was so proud."

Background Information

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 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, Virginia and one in Milwaukee, Wisconsin 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. This case study presents one of the customized employment participants from CEO in Milwaukee. The VCU-DRRP would like to thank "Dan" for sharing his story as well as Kevin and Christine Mifflin who own Esch Power Equipment. Dan's team included his family, Jenny Lichte, Alisa Rosado, Mary Ann Beckman, and Kevin and Christine Mifflin.

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If you have questions about this case study or about the VCU DRRP on Customized Employment, please contact:
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