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ABSTRACT

Major ongoing supported employment studies conducted at the Rehabilitation Research Training Center at Virginia Commonwealth University are profiled in this newsletter. The training center involves individuals with disabilities in the design, implementation, and interpretation of the research. The first research study examined the opinions of 110 individuals with disabilities who were working in supported employment. Results showed that 90 percent of these consumers liked their jobs and 96 percent were satisfied with supported employment and believed they would not be working without its assistance. The second research project was a vocational integration study of 390 consumers of supported employment services. Findings indicated a significant difference between the level of integration experienced by the consumers and the type of job they held. Consumers employed in clerical jobs were more integrated than in other job types. The third study was a national survey of 365 agencies which found that 98.9 percent of respondents reported that their agencies were continually converting facility-based resources to community-based employment. These participants were also asked questions on the use of Plans for Achieving Self-Support (PASS). Results showed that supported employment participants were major users of PASS plans. (CR)

Supported Employment Research: Impacting the Work Outcomes of Individuals with Disabilities.

Kregel, John
Wehman, Paul

RRTC

"Improving Supported Employment Outcomes for Individuals with the Most Severe Disabilities"

REHABILITATION RESEARCH AND TRAINING CENTER AT VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

Supported Employment Research: Impacting the Work Outcomes of Individuals with Disabilities

Research is the key to finding new answers to problems which face people with disabilities. This includes finding employment and being satisfied and successful with that employment. Many persons with severe disabilities have historically been unemployed or unable to re-enter the workforce after injury. Supported employment research provides the data for us to better understand the unemployment and work adjustment problems that these individuals encounter.

The major impetus of supported employment research has been to examine the growth trends and impact on the state of national systems of service delivery. For example, without quality supported employment research, we would be unable to report a tenfold growth in supported employment participants over the last eight years to Congress. Or, we could not report the impact of the Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS) program on employment for persons with severe disabilities to the Social Security Administration

The evolution of the RRTC's research reflects the growth of supported employment over the past decade. Ten years ago, research efforts were directed toward documenting the efficacy of this new service delivery approach, tracking the growth of the program across the nation, investigating employers' and family members' willingness to participate, and analyzing the economic benefits and costs of supported employment. As the program matured, we turned our attention toward developing tools that local programs could use to improve the quality of supported employment services in areas such as employer involvement, job development, vocational integration, and natural supports. Current efforts include investigations of the impact of various governmental and economic trends on the delivery of supported employment. Economic restructuring, the changing demographics of the work force, Medicaid, and Welfare reform efforts, "one-stop" career centers and changes in the Social Security system are all being studied from the perspective of their potential effect on individuals who may benefit from supported employment.

In this newsletter, we profile a handful of major ongoing supported employment studies at the RRTC. Our research program is grounded in the belief that those individuals most directly affected by the question under investigation should be directly involved in the design and implementation of the research study, as well as the interpretation of research findings. For example, in the study of consumer satisfaction described below, consumers were involved in defining the dimensions of satisfaction that should be addressed and developing the consumer satisfaction instrument. Then, a team of consumers was assembled to administer the questionnaire to more than 100 individuals across Virginia before the instrument was released for use across the nation. In the development of the vocational integration study, focus groups of consumers, employers, and employment specialists were convened to determine the various dimensions of integration and ways to conduct unobtrusive observations at work sites. Similarly, a group comprising directors of large and small facilities is assisting in the interpretation of the findings from our national provider survey.

We hope that this newsletter provides insight into our current investigations. The information included here should be considered an overview. Interested individuals should contact the Research Division of the RRTC for additional information on any of the topics found within this publication.

John Kregel & Paul Wehman

Consumer Satisfaction:

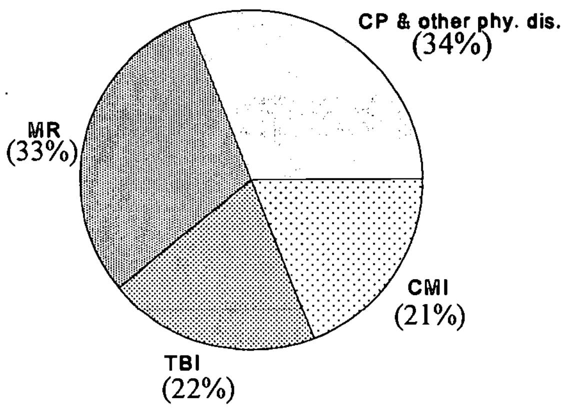
Findings and Recommendations for Customers of Supported Employment

Consumer Satisfaction Study: The opinions of 110 individuals with disabilities who were working in supported employment were obtained through a study conducted by the RRTC. Individuals with disabilities were actively involved in all aspects of this investigation providing input into how the study should be conducted, the development of the Consumer Satisfaction Survey instrument, and the completion of the survey through face-to-face interviews. The following summary highlights what consumers in Virginia have to say about supported employment.

1. What are the characteristics of the consumers who participated in the study?

Male: **60% of the participants**
Female: **40% of the participants**
Age Range: **19 to 52 years**
Average Age: **32 years**

Number of Participants by Disability:



2. What are the characteristics of the jobs where consumers work?

Participants were primarily employed in commercial (e.g., retail, store, or shop), food (e.g., restaurant, fast food), or service provider (e.g., church, park, agency) types of businesses. The positions held within these businesses included the following: clerk/office worker (27%), dishwasher/food prep/server (27%), stockclerk/warehouse (17%), janitor/housekeeper (8%), human service (6%), laborer (5%), machinery operator (4%), assembler/benchwork (3%), laundry (2%), other (2%), and groundskeeper/landscaper (1%). Wages ranged from $20.00 to $368.00 per week with the average wage equaling $159.38 per week. Participants were employed between 1 month and 6 years with 2.3 years being the average length of employment.

3. How satisfied are consumers with their jobs?

The majority of consumers surveyed (90%) like their jobs. Similar to any employee, many of the participants indicated that they enjoy some aspects of the job and dislike others.

Things that consumers like about their jobs include:

- people (coworkers, public);
- the job duties (washing dishes, physical labor, stocking);
- the work conditions (atmosphere, breaks, hours);
- having a job (just working); and
- the pay.

Consumers don't like the following about their jobs:

- people (e.g., "talking down", petty fighting, customers complaining, coworkers taking too many breaks);
- the work conditions (indoors, interruptions, dirty, slow periods, stressful);
- the work schedule (weekends, not enough hours, evening hours, overtime);
- the pay and benefits (not enough, no benefits); and
- the job is boring.

4. How satisfied are consumers with supported employment services?

The majority (96%) are satisfied with supported employment and feel that they would not be working without its assistance. Many **(80%)** think that supported employment assisted them as much as can be expected. Overwhelmingly, participants said that they would use supported employment again if they lost their jobs or decided to change jobs **(93%)** and would recommend supported employment to a friend **(92%)**.

5. How satisfied are consumers with their job coaches?

The majority of participants said that their job coach has been very helpful **(85%)** or sometimes helpful **(16%)**. Most consumers would like their job coach to visit them at the job site about the same as they are **(74%)**; while some would like visits more **(18%)** or less **(8%)** often. Consumers generally like their job coach and say that if given the choice, they would:

- keep their same job coach **(87%)**,
- have a job coach that used to work with them **(11%)**,
- get a different job coach **(2%)**.

6. Has supported employment affected the lives of consumers?

Consumers feel that their lives have gotten better **(73%)**, stayed about the same **(24%)**, or become worse **(3%)** since starting to work at their jobs. The ways individuals feel their lives are better now that they are working include the following:

- having more money;
- being more productive;
- gaining personal benefits (e.g., more self confidence);
- experiencing major life changes (e.g,. opening a savings account, taking a cruise);
- becoming more independent; and
- developing friendships.

The Vocational Integration Index contains a Job Scale and Consumer Scale each containing 32 multiple choice items that are organized into four subscales including: company indicators, employee indicators, work area indicators, and benefit indicators. The Job Scale describes the opportunities for physical and social integration that are available at a particular job site. The Consumer Scale describes the extent that an individual is integrated at his or her job in relation to the opportunities that are offered.

The Vocational Integration Study. RRTC conducted a study to investigate the nature and degree of integration offered by businesses and the extent with which workers with disabilities are taking advantage of the opportunities that are available. The Job and Consumer Scale of the Vocational Integration Index were completed for 390 consumers who were served by 19 supported employment programs nationwide. The majority of persons were employed in the individual placement model, although enclave and mobile crew group models also were represented.

1. In what types of businesses are consumers working?

The primary businesses where individuals were employed include commercial business **(40%)**, food service **(27%)**, industrial **(10%)**, and service provider **(7%)**. The job title/positions held by consumers were reported as follows:

- 30% dishwasher, food preparation, food server, or front dining attendant;
- 16% janitor/housekeeper;
- 16% stockclerk/grocery;
- 15% assembler/benchworker;
- 11% clerical/office worker;
- 4% other;
- 3% human service;
- 3% laborer;
- 3% laundry; and
- 1% groundskeeper

2. To what extent are consumers integrated at their jobs?

Differences in scores on the Job and Consumer Scales indicate a variation in the available opportunities for integration at a job and the extent that consumers are taking advantage of those opportunities. These differences suggest that consumers are not as fully integrated as the job would allow, more so in the areas of company benefits and coworker activities.

3. What aspects of the job offer the most and least integration?

Consumers are working in a variety of jobs that offer varying degrees of integration for the employees who work there. In looking at the items on the Job Scale, high scores on several of these suggest that specific aspects of the job offer more integration than others. In these job, employees have regular contact with coworkers, socialize throughout the work day, have a company ...isor oversee activities, receive assistance from others with work and work-related matters, interact with their coworkers throughout the work day and during lunch and break, follow similar workdays as other employees, joke around during lunch and break, are paid by the company, have regular raise reviews, and earn comparable wages to their peers.

4. In what ways are consumers the most and least integrated?

Consumers participate in the opportunities for integration at varying levels depending upon what is available and what their personal preferences are. Based on the items on the Consumer Scale, workers seem to be experiencing more integration in some areas than in others. At their jobs, consumers have regular contact with coworkers, socialize throughout the workday, have a company supervisor oversee activities, receive assistance from others with work or work-related matters, interact with coworkers throughout the workday, follow similar workdays as coworkers, are paid by the company, have regular raise reviews, and earn comparable wages.

However, in some areas consumers are experiencing minimal integration. These are primarily related to their taking full advantage of formal supports offered by the company; participating in social activities with coworkers outside work hours; and receiving medical, personal, and sick leave benefits.

5. What effect does length of employment have on level of integration?

The average length of employment for participants was 2.55 years. The findings indicate that the longer consumers are employed at a job the more integrated they are with greater effects in regards to their specific work area and coworker activities.

6. What impact does type of job have on integration?

A significant difference was found between the level of integration experienced by consumers and the type of job where they were employed. Overall, consumers who were employed in clerical jobs were more integrated than those working in other (e.g., human service, bus driver, teacher assistant), stock clerk/grocer, janitor/housekeeper, and food service jobs, while those employed in industrial/factory jobs are experiencing the least amount of integration (4.93, $p>.001$).

There is a significant relationship between the opportunities available for integration at a job and the type of job. In general, clerical jobs offer greater opportunities for integration than other (e.g, human service, bus driver, teacher assistant), janitor/housekeeper, and stock clerk/grocery jobs while food service and industrial jobs have the least amount of integration available. Furthermore, clerical jobs offer greater integration in the areas of the company characteristics (7.75, $p>.991$); clerical, other, and janitor/housekeeper jobs have greater opportunities in the area of employee activities (3.77, $p >.001$); and clerical jobs offer more integration in terms of benefits (2.84, $p>.01$).

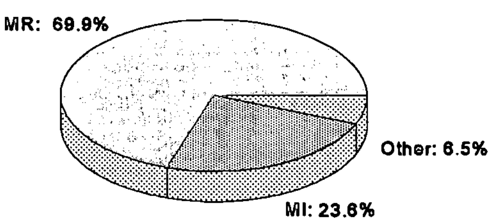
The Rehabilitation Research and Training Center initiated the National Supported Employment Provider Survey to evaluate how supported employment services (SE) are being implemented and funded. The survey was conducted via the telephone, with representatives of 385 randomly selected supported employment provider agencies in 40 states. The telephone participants were initially asked to provide demographic information, followed by an item which pertained to each of the major issues of the survey.

Demographic Information

The respondents were typically coordinators of their SE program or executive directors of their agencies. They provided the following information: the area and consumers to whom they provided services, the total staff size of their agencies, the staff size of their SE division, the total size of their SE caseload, and the type of placement model used. **The respondents served consumers in the following areas:** rural 38.8%; mixed 39.8%; urban 18%; suburban <4%.

The majority of the provider agencies (67.5%) served multiple disability groups. The remaining providers served a single disability group as specified in the following graph.

Single Disability Group Providers



The total agency staff size, which included facility-based and community-based services, was <u>nine time's</u> higher than the staff allotted to SE. The telephone participants had a mean total agency staff size of **81.2**, with a mean of only **nine persons** occupying the SE staff. The supported employment provider agencies had a mean SE caseload of **47.6 consumers**. The survey participants also were asked to identify which placement model that their agency used. Slightly over half **(50.4%)** of the supported employment provider agencies utilized an individual placement model, followed by **48.3%** who used an individual and group placement model. Only **1.3%** of the provider agencies exclusively used a group placement model.

Conversion

Less than **<u>one-fourth</u>** of the supported employment provider agencies reported that they were downsizing their facility-based services or converting these ; to community-based employment services. Prior to downsizing, the supported employment provider agencies served an average of **123.2** persons in facility-based services and devoted **83.9%** of their total vocational services' budgets to segregated services. After downsizing, there was a decrease in the number of individuals served in facility-based services **(90.2%)**, and the amount of money allotted to facility-based programs **(54.1%)**.

Almost all of the participants (98.8%) reported that their agencies were continually converting facility-based resources to community-based employment. Furthermore, almost three-fourths of the respondents indicated that their agencies had set goals to further reduce the number of individuals served in facility-based programs. Some of the agencies' goals specified having a majority of individuals with disabilities in supported employment programs **(38.8%)**, completely converting their facility-based services to community-based employment **(10%)**, and continually serving a majority of their consumers in facility-based programs **(10%)**. Although most of the SE provider agencies had goals to reduce the number of individuals in facility-based services, only **42.7%** reported that they had a written plan to guide their downsizing or conversion process.

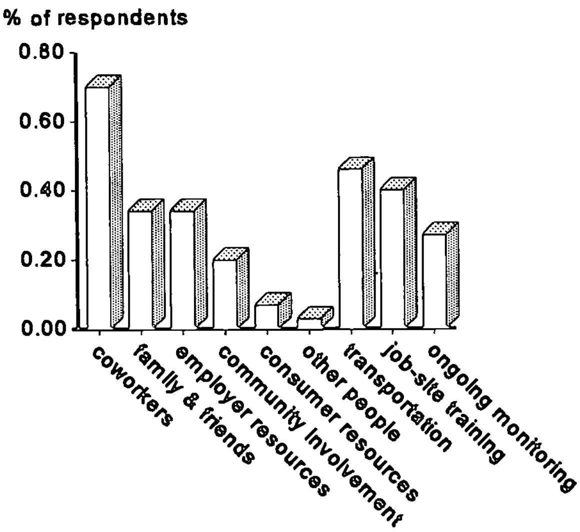
Problems Identified by Agencies in Planning or Implementing Conversion

36.6%	of those surveyed identified consumer or family reluctance
24.4%	staff resistance
24.4%	limited program funds
20.7%	community attitudes or low expectations
15.6%	unfavorable local labor market conditions
14.6%	transportation difficulties

The majority of respondents believed that their Boards of Directors, funding agencies, and consumers were supportive of downsizing efforts. There was less support from supported employment agency staff and the consumers' families. **Almost half** of the telephone participants indicated that their downsizing or conversion efforts have met their expectations. More than **40%** of the survey respondents believed their downsizing or conversion process had fallen short of their expectations. A few supported employment provider agencies **(9.9%)** believed that their downsizing or conversion goals have exceeded their expectations.

Natural Supports

More than 80% of the supported employment provider agencies indicated that they emphasize natural supports in the delivery of SE services. The telephone participants provided information on what supported employment provider agencies considered to be natural supports. These include the following:



Identified Natural Supports

Almost all (93.3%) of the SE provider agencies identified that they use natural supports during job-site training and follow-along (96%). The respondents also considered it important to use natural supports during job development **(78.3%)** and consumer assessment or planning **(66.1%)**. More than **80%** of the survey participants thought that natural supports were useful and relevant for all of the individuals on their caseloads. The remaining telephone participants did not agree that natural supports were useful for all of their consumers. Usefulness depended on several factors such as the type of job or workplace **(33.9%),** consumer characteristics **(22%),** disability classification **(15.3%)**, and severity of disability **(15.3%)**.

Approximately **16%** of the consumers' jobs were found through the social networks and contacts of consumers, their families, and friends. The survey respondents used coworkers or supervisors to provide initial training in work skills and behaviors with **41.5%** of their caseloads. Coworkers or supervisors were used with **56.3%** to provide ongoing monitoring and follow-along services. Finally, the respondents indicated that they modified a job to build in social interaction opportunities for **21.9%** of their caseloads. The following table displays how the respondents felt their agencies had changed as a result of using natural supports.

Agency Changes Since Using Natural Supports	
44.6%	of the respondents indicated that staff/agency functions had changed.
32.5%	said staff time on the job site.
23.5%	identified staff/agency commitments to employers.
13.3%	responded that staff job descriptions had changed, since they began to emphasize natural supports.

Approximately half of the telephone participants encountered some major obstacles or problems in using natural supports in the workplace. The following were identified as problems in implementing natural supports:

42.5% resistance from employers, supervisors, or coworkers;
35.9% difficulty locating natural supports on the job;
16.8% reduction in program effectiveness or efficiency;
7.8% resistance from families;
6.6% dissatisfaction from employers;
6.6% lower job retention;
4.8% lack of consumer advocacy on the job;
3% dissatisfaction from consumers;
3% difficulty placing or maintaining the jobs of persons with very severe disabilities.

<u>In summary, the majority of supported employment provider agencies are using natural supports in the delivery of supported employment services</u>. The consumers' coworkers are mainly identified as a source of natural supports. Coworkers or supervisors take an active role in providing initial training in work skills and behaviors with more than 40% of the consumers in supported employment. However, the consumers' employers, supervisors, or coworkers have also been an obstacle to over half of the telephone participants in implementing natural supports in the work environment.

Pass Plans

Findings from the National Supported Employment Provider Survey

Recently, the Social Security Administration (SSA) initiated major changes in the approval of new Plans for Achieving Self-Support (PASS). Concerns cited by SSA reflect those included in a recent Government Accounting Office (GAO) report, including the following issues:

1.) PASS plans rarely result in individuals leaving the SSA beneficiary rolls and are predominantly used to enable individuals to remain permanently eligible for benefits.

2.) PASS plans are frequently used to enable individuals to purchase vehicles, a purpose for which the program was never intended.

3.) Little oversight is provided once a PASS plan has been approved by a local SSA office.

The impact of the proposed changes to the PASS program is of major concern to supported employment customers and programs nationally. Therefore, this article provides information on the effects that changes in SSA policies may have on customers of supported employment.

National Supported Employment Provider Survey

The RRTC on Supported Employment completed a survey of program coordinators or executive directors of 385 randomly selected supported employment provider agencies located in 40 states. Through a series of 30 minute telephone interviews, information was obtained on the use of PASS plans by supported employment customers. A summary of the results follow.

Supported employment participants are major users of PASS plans. The PASS program, like all of the SSA work incentives, appear to be underutilized within the SSI and DI programs as a whole. SSA reports that less than 3% of working SSI recipients are participating in the PASS program. In contrast, well over half **(58%)** of the agencies interviewed for the RRTC study reported that PASS plans had been used by consumers in their agencies in the past year. These agencies also indicated that PASS plans had been developed by **13.3%** of the consumers on their caseloads.

Supported employment consumers are likely to use PASS plans to support transportation to and from the job and to purchase extended services. Respondents were requested to describe the two primary objectives for which PASS plans were written for their supported employment consumers. The following table indicates that PASS plans were used predominantly to finance transportation and other needed materials, equipment, and services, and to finance the supported employment service itself.

Services & Supports Funded by PASS Plans

Purchase	% of Respondents Reporting
Transportation to Job Site	25.3%
Purchase Vehicle	20.1%
Supported employment services	19.2%
Work tools, equipment, clothes	7.9%
Employment-related services	7.5%
Adaptive equipment	6.0%
Personal assistant services	3.8%
Other	10.3%

The problems and barriers encountered by supported employment consumers and provider agencies in utilizing PASS plans are predominantly administrative in nature. Respondents were asked to describe problems and barriers they had experienced in using Social Security Work Incentives in their supported employment programs. Over one-third of the respondents **(38.0%)** reported that they had experienced no problems or barriers in utilizing these incentive programs. The problems and barriers most frequently reported are listed on the following page.

Pass Plans

Findings from the National Supported Employment Provider Survey

FREQUENTLY ENCOUNTERED PROBLEMS USING WORK INCENTIVES

Problem/Barrier	% of Respondents Reporting
Approval process takes too long	15.0%
Consumer/family discontinued	9.2%
Paperwork too extensive/ difficult	8.2%
Approval rates too low	7.8%
Consumer needs don't match allowable expenses	6.8%
Allowable sheltered income too low to make worthwhile	5.5%

Current efforts by the Social Security Administration to modify the use of PASS plans have tremendous implications for supported employment programs. It is imperative that agencies providing supported employment monitor program changes to determine their impact on the continuing employment of supported employment participants. The major implications of the present study are summarized below.

First, the findings of this study indicate that PASS plans are being widely used by supported employment agencies and consumers as a means of achieving competitive employment.

Over half of the agencies interviewed reported the use of PASS plans. In the past year, PASS plans had been written for 13.3% of their caseloads. This rate far exceeds the use of these incentives for working SSA beneficiaries nationwide, and **only represents those written in the year prior to the survey.** Moreover, supported employment participants as a group appear to be actively involved in determining how set-aside income will be used to further their employment goals. Changes in PASS plan regulations and policies will have a disparate impact on supported employment programs.

Second, supported employment customers are utilizing PASS plans for services and support that directly relates to their ability to maintain their present jobs.

The primary use of PASS plans cited by respondents was to obtain transportation to and from the job. For the vast majority of these individuals, transportation services included purchasing specialized transportation, car-pooling, or reimbursing coworkers for transportation to and from the job. Rarely did participants use PASS plans to purchase vehicles. Of equal importance is the fact that one in five PASS plans is being developed to finance employment support services, either through a direct payment to a supported employment provider agency or for individual support needs.

Finally, efforts made by supported employment provider agencies and consumers to learn about PASS plans appears to be paying off. The findings indicate that provider agencies experience few problems accessing work incentives.

The average approval rate was 90.4% of PASSes submitted by the supported employment agencies. A significant proportion of respondents indicated that they had not experienced any problems using PASS plans with their customers. The problems reported tended to be factors outside of the control of the provider or the consumer, such as lengthy approval processes and extensive documentation required by SSA caseworkers.

In conclusion, Social Security Work Incentives are increasingly being used as a resource for supported employment providers and consumers. Many individuals would be unable to access services or enter the work force without income set-aside to finance transportation, supported employment services, and other needed employment-related goods and services. Supported employment provider agencies and advocates must carefully monitor any changes to the program to ensure that consumers do not have their employment jeopardized by any new restrictions to the PASS program.

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Virginia Commonwealth University's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment

Virginia Commonwealth University's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment was funded in October 1993 for a third, 5-year period by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, Grant #H133B30071. The RRTC provides research, training, and leadership on supported employment for citizens with the most severe disabilities. Research at the Center focuses on supported employment policy analysis, program implementation at the systems and consumer levels, and program evaluation issues. The RRTC provides training for rehabilitation counselors, program managers, employment specialists, educators, university students, employers, parents, and other persons interested in supported employment. For further information on this newsletter, write to Dr. John Kregel, P.O. Box 842011, Richmond, VA 23284-2011 or phone (804) 828-1851.

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RRTC Announces...New Video Product:
Person-Centered Planning: Promoting Customer Choice

SET NET is a personnel training project for individuals interested in supported employment. This product is a post-production SET NET telecast video which is open-captioned and unedited. The on-going nature, long term commitment, and values associated with the person-centered planning approach are examined. Practical strategies for starting, implementing, and maintaining person-centered planning are described. Self-advocacy strategies and barriers to overcome are discussed. Learn how to use the process of person-centered planning for promoting choice as a lifelong commitment, as well as a career and job development tool.

Cost: $49.99 (2 hours) Original air date May 24, 1995.
Order No. SNL006
Please make checks payable to Virginia Commonwealth University, or you may use an agency purchase order. Send your request to the attention of Ms. Teri Blakenship, VCU/RRTC, PO Box 842011, Richmond, VA 23284-2011.

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