QUALITY OF LIFE OUTCOMES OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

ALISON PEDLAR

University of Waterloo

JOHN LORD and MEG VAN LOON

Centre for Research and Education in Human Services

ABSTRACT

This paper reports on the findings of a qualitative study of supported employment. The purpose of the study was to trace the process whereby people with a developmental handicap entered supported employment and became employed in regular jobs, and to consider the quality of life of those individuals. The quality of life of all participants was considerably enhanced as a result of the supported employment experience. The study also identified several problem areas and strategies for improving supported employment, particularly with respect to providing unobtrusive support in the workplace and facilitating social integration of the employee.

INTRODUCTION

Our quality of life is very much tied to our work and the very fact of having a job remains critical to most people's well-being. For individuals with a disability, unemployment rates continue to be very high. According to the *Health and Activity Limitation Survey* conducted by Statistics Canada (1988), of the 1,817,430 disabled persons in Canada aged 15 to 64 living in private households, only 39.2% were employed during the time period August to October, 1986.

Several studies have noted the need for innovation in employment projects and practices if people with handicaps are to participate more fully in the community (Bellamy, Wilcox, Rose, & McDonnell, 1985; Canadian Mental Health Association [CMHA], 1984a, 1984b; Hutchison, Lord, Savage, & Schnarr, 1985; Kappel, 1985; Shelton, 1983; Symington, 1983; Wehman & Moon, 1982). In the last 10 years, some researchers have begun to explore how integrated work can best be accomplished for people with mental handicaps (Bellamy, Rhodes, Mank, & Albin, 1988; Brown et al., 1983; Rusch, 1986; Wehman, 1988). Canadian projects have also begun to demonstrate the viability of regular employment for people with mental handicaps (British Columbians for Mentally Handicapped People [BCMHP], 1984; Brown, Bayer, & MacFarlane, 1985; Cartan, 1984; Metropolitan Toronto Association for Community Living [MTACL] &

The study reported in this article was funded by the Research Grants Program, Ministry of Community and Social Services, Ontario. Copies of the comprehensive research report, *Supported Employment and Quality of Life*, are available from the Centre for Research and Education, P.O. Box 3036, Station C, Kitchener, Ontario N2G 4R5.

Metropolitan Toronto School Board, 1988; Perrin, 1986; Prince Edward Island Department of Health and Social Services, 1986; Sandys, 1987).

When a new initiative emerges which offers employment opportunities for disabled persons, it is likely to be embraced with zeal. Supported employment has emerged as an exciting and effective initiative in terms of increasing the number of people with disabilities who are able to enter competitive employment. It has been adopted fairly rapidly and widely, most especially by organizations and agencies serving individuals with developmental handicaps.

Understanding quality of life in terms of the experiences of individuals who have succeeded in gaining access to integrated work situations provides a unique opportunity to more fully consider the implications of employment initiatives and future policy direction. Commenting on the challenge of understanding quality of life in relation to program evaluation, Landesman (1986) has noted:

To judge the effectiveness of any reform effort, we must establish evaluative standards. Despite the tremendous concern with accountability, we have failed to develop clear procedures for measuring the "success" of a given program *at an individual level*, that is, sensitive to a person's own perceptions of quality of life and adjusted to specific goals in that individual's life (p. 142).

Recognizing the relevance of Landesman's comment, this study was designed to draw from the study participants their definition of quality of life, based on their own experiences and perceptions. The research was thus entirely inductive and did not attempt to impose preconceived notions of what it ought to mean to these individuals to have gone through a process of entering the competitive labour market, and what the outcome of that ought to be in relation to their quality of life. This paper describes a study, then, which traced the process whereby people with a developmental handicap became involved in supported employment and considers the outcome of this process in terms of individual quality of life. The focus of this study was on the individual rather than the systemic level of investigation. The intention was to understand the working experiences from the perspectives of the supported employees and their social networks, and to draw from them their values and perspectives in terms of what the impact of the supported employment experience had been on their quality of life.

DEFINING SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

As with many other innovations and changes in traditional approaches to human-service systems, there are differing interpretations and understandings of what supported employment means. For the purpose of this study, *supported employment was defined as paid work in normal work settings, with ongoing support being provided on an as-needed basis*. In this paper we use the term *employee* to refer to the individual in supported employment. The term *employment support worker* refers to the person who provides support to the employee and who might also be referred to as "job coach."

Unlike traditional approaches to vocational rehabilitation which train and then place the individual, supported employment involves placing and training the person at the actual job site. This distinctive dimension of supported employ-

ment means questions about "job readiness" do not arise. Training and ongoing support are provided at the job site on an as-needed basis. This support generally involves an employment support worker who is part of a human-service agency and provides a bridge between the supported employee and the employment situation.

DESIGN AND METHOD

This research was conducted in the qualitative tradition. In describing qualitative methods, Patton (1980) notes:

The qualitative methodologist attempts to understand the multiple interrelationships among dimensions which emerge from the data without making prior assumptions about the linear or correlative relationships among narrowly defined, operationalized variables. In short, an inductive approach to evaluation research means that an understanding of program activities and outcomes emerges from experience with the program (p. 41).

The research was concerned with the perceptions and realities of the supported employment experience and quality of life of the individual with a disability. Bercovici (1983) has noted that qualitative research takes into account the system and environment of which the individual is part. In order to develop a detailed understanding of the process of supported employment and the quality of life of the individual, based on the experiences of the person, the research design for this study was structured in such a way so as to amplify the life experiences of people with a developmental handicap. As outlined below, this meant learning from the individuals themselves and from people in their support network what the life of the individual was like following their involvement in supported employment.

Thus, like most qualitative research, this study did not begin with a theory or hypothesis to test. Rather, in the tradition of grounded theory (Blumer, 1969; Glasser & Strauss, 1967) the experiences, perceptions, and actions of the study participants formed the basis of the data gathered. The qualitative research method as applied in this study attempts to understand the reality of people's lives within a social context (Barnow, 1986).

SAMPLE

The research team was supported by an advisory group consisting of individuals with extensive experience in the field of employment and support services to individuals with a disability. Based on their knowledge of the field, the advisory group identified a pool of agencies located within southern Ontario which were recognized as meeting the following criteria. From this pool, the research team randomly selected four agencies to participate in this study, two from urban centres and two from rural settings.

- normalization and integration were valued objectives of the agency;
- the agency offered supported employment, rather than simply placement services;
- the agency had experience (minimum 18 months) in supported employment, and had a range of employment opportunities;

- individual choice was recognized in job selection and design, taking account of the needs of the individual and the employer.

The participating agencies were asked to supply a list of people who had been part of the supported employment program for a minimum of three months, were receiving a range of support, had a history of segregation, were involved in a range of jobs, and were receiving minimum wage or more.

From the lists of supported employees submitted by agencies, the research team selected a total of 13 people according to the above noted criteria. It turned out that one of these individuals was employed with a small group of disabled persons in a situation which was not individualized or totally integrated. Hence this person is not included as part of the overall findings of this study.

PROCEDURE

The researchers met with the supported employees prior to commencing data collection to explain the study and establish an understanding between the individual and the researcher with respect to each other and the nature of the study. At the data collection stage, separate interviews were held with the individuals and members of their network as outlined in Chart A. Fifty-four first-round interviews were held. These lasted from one to one and a half hours, and were tape recorded. Second interviews were held with the supported employees and their job coaches three to four months after the first round of interviews. The primary purpose of this second round of interviews was to see what sort of changes people experienced around their work during the intervening three months. It also provided an important opportunity to verify themes and patterns which had emerged during our earlier discussions. Finally, in eight of the 12 employment situations we spent time observing the person in his or her work environment. Observation time ranged from 10 minutes to half an hour, and was designed to assist the researchers in better understanding the job, the nature of the support provided, and the interaction between the employee and other workers.

DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative researcher sees human behaviour as a function of how people perceive their world. The task of the qualitative researcher is to capture this process of interpretation (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975). The approach used in this study recognized the significance of the "participants as experts," so that the data base was driven by their experiences and perceptions. In interpreting the data, the researchers used a five-step framework of analysis. This essentially inductive process is rigorous and consistent with well established approaches to qualitative research (Patton, 1980). The framework is outlined below:

- (1) Using transcripts of interviews, coders sought out key words and phrases which the individuals used to describe their experiences, situations, perceptions, values, struggles, accomplishments, and feelings. These were then coded.
- (2) Commonalities and differences between an individual and his or her network were identified.
- (3) Patterns were compared across individuals and their networks.

QUALITY OF LIFE OUTCOMES OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

(4) Themes which explained the data were identified and documented. For instance, one of the themes, *Communication*, is discussed below. This was a theme which helped us understand that, in the process of supported employment, people were being talked to by the employer *through the job coach*, rather than a more direct approach of the employer relaying information to the employee.

(5) In the final stage, we identified quality-of-life themes as contained in the information people gave us about their employment situation and its impact

CHART A
Study Participants

Supported employee	Type of work	Previous jobs	Tenure of present job	FT/PT	Gender	Pay/hr. \$	Significant other particip.			
							ESW	EM	CW	FA/RESWK
1	Auto cleaning	1	8 mos.	FT	M	5.00	X	X	X	X
2	Fast food prep.	2	3 mos.	PT	F	4.75	X	-	-	X
3	Maintenance/factory	1	3 yrs.	FT	M	7.25	X	-	-	X
4	Janitorial	-	1 yr.	PT	F	5.00	X	X	-	X
5	Food processing	1	3 yrs.	FT	F	5.50	X	X	X	XX
6	Fast food prep.	-	22 mos.	PT	M	4.75	X	X	X	X
7	Fast food prep.	6	10 mos.	PT	F	4.55	X	X	X	X
8	Lumber yard	1	18 mos.	FT	M	7.27	X	X	-	X
9	Food processing	1	43 mos.	FT	F	4.47	X	X	-	X
10	Shelf stocker	-	3 yrs.	PT	M	4.75	X	X	X	X
11	Merchandizer	1	30 mos.	FT	F	6.55	X	X	X	X
12	Office support	-	1 yr.	FT	F	5.00	X	X	X	X

Legend

ESW	Employment support worker
EM	Employer/Supervisor
CW	Coworker
FA/RESWK	Family member/Residential support worker
FT	Full-time
PT	Part-time

on how they felt about themselves, their job, their overall sense of well being, and their relationships both within and beyond the workplace.

It is from the themes which emerged from the data that we draw our conclusions with respect to the process of supported employment and the quality of life as experienced by the 12 people who participated in this research. Two themes explaining the process of supported employment, "Getting started" and "Communication: Understanding the world of work," are discussed below.

PROCESS OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT THEMES

Getting Started

Embarking on supported employment signalled a major juncture in the lives of the people who participated in this study, as they moved from segregated work settings into workplaces in the community at large. Everybody had experienced varying degrees of segregation, and we suspected that the prospect of venturing into the mainstream working world may have required some redefinition of people's self identity. In fact, we found that people adapted fairly quickly to the idea of working in the community.

Our findings indicate that people did not have a great deal of choice as to what job they obtained when they moved into regular employment. In most instances it appeared that people did not decide to leave the workshop and start "job hunting." A job opportunity was presented to the individual by the employment support worker and that was usually the job the person pursued. If they were successful in the interview and were offered the job, then more often than not people accepted the first offer they received.

Nisbet and Callahan (1987) stress the importance of matching "the conditions and requirements of a particular job site with the individual characteristics of potential employees" (p. 185). They suggest that often a community job is secured and the next person on the supported employment agency waiting list is placed in that position, regardless of job type. Cooley, Sewell, and Rich (1985) note the relationship between job satisfaction and ensuring that job identification meets the needs of the individual.

It is worth noting here that others have expressed concern in the past about the need to pay particular heed to job preferences and choice. Seltzer (1978) points out that job choice/job satisfaction has been ignored by researchers and service providers. She suggests people with a developmental handicap who have managed to obtain employment "are expected to be content with whatever work they are assigned to" (p. 254). Her study reinforces the need to pay attention to people's "aspirations and anticipated feelings of satisfaction."

We encountered a few interesting examples of job-person match, where people seemed genuinely to have made a choice according to their job preference. These people had made a conscious decision to remove themselves from the sheltered workshop and find a job in the competitive labour market. As one woman recounted her decision to leave the workshop

I quit on my own. Nobody ever told me I had to quit. All I did, I just said, "Fine, I'm quitting." It was my own decision.

When we met her, this woman had actually had several community-based jobs. She knew what she wanted in a job and was able to exercise her preference in job identification. Her employment support worker explained:

She doesn't read, but she gets one of her neighbours to read the paper to her, all the want ads, she is so eager to work. So she came in and said to me, "I want to apply for that."

As a research finding, this situation represented the exception rather than the rule. More usually, the employment support worker would lose sight of the actual job preference of the individual in favour of simply getting the person placed. The following remark from one support worker suggests that, in this instance, whether or not the employee would be interested and actually want the job was not an issue:

At the time when he was offered this job, *I had just got it* and I knew it was wage paying and I knew all he would have to do was go to the interview and he would have that job.

What seems to have been of more relevance here was simply the fact that the support worker had *obtained* the job on behalf of the individual and there was no question that either the person would not be offered the job or in fact would turn it down. This is indicative of the difficulties that can arise when a support worker tends to take ownership of the job offer and acts as gatekeeper with respect to opening doors on behalf of the individual he or she supports.

Communication: Understanding the World of Work

In any job, communication plays a significant part in a person's ability to understand expectations and perform according to those expectations. The results of this research are particularly helpful in shedding light on communication processes in supported employment. Primarily because the research was conducted around a "network" of people, rather than focusing on one particular perspective, we were able to gain a deeper understanding of how people were affected by communication and the problems that occur in communication processes. We found that in some instances problems existed in giving direct feedback to the employee, and in those instances where direct feedback occurred, people were more satisfied.

In the initial stages of getting started in a supported employment position when a support worker is very much in evidence, the assumption generally seemed to be that all communication to the employee was to be transmitted via the support worker. People in the workplace generally appeared to be much more comfortable communicating via the support worker, most especially when they needed to communicate something negative to the individual. As one employer explained it:

I had somebody else to turn to . . . somebody else to talk to the person, the employee, to try to straighten it out better than I could. I don't like to offend anybody, particularly somebody that was under a handicap, I certainly wasn't going to offend in any way, shape, or form. So I didn't really have to. I didn't want to get nasty, so I didn't get nasty. But with [the support worker] coming in and talking to her maybe once a week for the first month or so, and anything that I had that was wrong, I didn't have to tell the employee, so

if there was a misunderstanding, I could tell that [support worker] and she could talk to her after work or privately, and then it was understood.

Interestingly, the employee in question had a very different perspective on the matter:

[The support worker] used to come and see how I was doing, and then I guess they said something about me when I first started here, but they never ever told me how I was . . . I'd like to hear what they said about me.

Perhaps not surprisingly, employers and supervisors appeared to have more difficulty with providing negative as opposed to positive feedback to the employee. One manager felt that by using the support worker to provide negative feedback to the employee, he "would not have to worry about her feelings." Another employer said that if it was necessary to correct the employee he would "talk to the support worker and the support worker would be able to say it in such a way that maybe [the employee] could take it a little better." The same manager, however, appeared to have equally as much difficulty communicating positively to the individual:

Well, she tries hard. I know she tries hard. She should feel that she's doing a good job. Whether she needs constant reinforcement that way, I just don't see her that often because she's ready to go when I come in.

Another supervisor clearly felt awkward giving praise directly to the individual:

I pull him in once a year to talk to him about the wage. Like, he knows he's important without even me saying anything, because we need his stock. He knows we need what he does.

The employee, on the other hand, would have much preferred to hear directly from the supervisor. When asked by our researcher if the manager let him know whether or not he was doing a good job, this person replied:

He doesn't tell me, no. He usually tells [my support worker] but he doesn't tell me, "Hey, you are doing a good job" . . . It would be nice if he would say it once in a while.

Once employees were settled, there was less formal support from the support worker involving fewer visits to the workplace. In at least five instances where employers had grown accustomed to communicating primarily with the support worker, it seemed that communication at this point tended to virtually cease. This often caused problems for the individual in terms of not understanding what was expected of him or her.

A few employers preferred to give feedback directly to the employee rather than going through the support worker, and in the case of both positive and negative feedback, they felt it appropriate to speak to the employee immediately when the situation warranted it. One manager who had established a particularly good rapport with the employee noted that:

One of the first things I was taught as a manager was to give positive input to the staff when they are doing a good job.

The employee in this case confirmed to us that her boss did not hesitate to reprimand her if she was not performing satisfactorily. She had once been involved in a "prank" at work and her boss had told her that she must never do that again and

that it was not funny. The point had immediately been made directly to the employee rather than reporting the incident to the support worker, who would then relay it to the employee. The employee in this case further reported to us that she felt she had "a good boss."

It was clear from our findings that when communication took place *directly* between the employer and the employee, then the employee was more likely to be satisfied with the outcome, which in turn had a positive effect on the person's quality of life.

In the following paragraphs we summarize four themes which emerged in relation to people's perception of their quality of life. These themes are "Job satisfaction," "Self-worth," "Value of a paycheque," and "Relationships."

QUALITY OF LIFE THEMES

Job Satisfaction

Job satisfaction is critical to the way one experiences work and the general quality of one's life. As Moseley (1988) points out, in order to discuss job satisfaction in a meaningful way, one must have experienced something other than one's present job to provide a basis for comparison. It is relevant to note that all the participants in this study had, at some period in their working lives, experienced segregated working conditions, as in a sheltered workshop. Eight of the participants had also had at least one other job in the community. Some of these jobs had been unpaid and of relatively short duration. In any event, everybody had some other work experience with which to compare their present situations.

We were interested in knowing what sort of aspirations people had for their futures, since they had made the move out of the sheltered workshop and into the competitive workforce. Even though the majority of people expressed satisfaction with their current jobs, it is not unreasonable to expect that they might, perhaps as a result of that experience, begin to consider alternative community-based jobs. Where people were less obviously satisfied with their present jobs, we were particularly interested in learning what sort of alternatives they might be considering. Our findings suggest that some people were "locked-in," with little opportunity for challenge or advancement.

Several other researchers and practitioners have pointed out that people with mental handicaps may, by virtue of their life experiences, be anxious to do and say what others want. Consequently, "responses to questions may reflect more of the person's desire to please than his or her actual beliefs" (Moseley, 1988, p. 213). As well, when people's experiences are relatively limited, it will obviously be more difficult to envisage alternatives beyond their present situation. However, as McLoughlin, Garner, and Callahan (1987) suggest, advancement should be taken into consideration when seeking appropriate employment and people should "consider the first job opportunity as an initial phase in career development" (p. 14).

We asked people who participated in this study whether they had considered moving to another position and whether they had any thoughts or dreams for their future. In some instances, people seemed uncertain of what we meant by "a

future." In addition, once people appeared to be settled in a job, it was rare for a support worker, or anyone else around the individual, to start talking about possible alternatives that might be attractive to the person. In four cases, where people were somewhat ambivalent about their feelings around their current job, or were not entirely satisfied with their working situation, they seemed to have no sense of being able to choose to pursue an alternative job. Support workers advised us that these individuals had not indicated interest in any other type of work or position. However, when we explored alternatives with these people who were expressing some dissatisfaction with their current situations, they independently identified different job interests. For example, one man who had been performing the same task in a fast food outlet for a little under two years, indicated to us that he would like a job working in a gas station. His support worker appeared not to know about this possible job interest. In another case, a woman who liked to be around people, had a part-time job and worked entirely alone, completing her daily assignment prior to the arrival of any other workers. She also spent part of her day in the sheltered workshop situation where she enjoyed the contact with people. Her support worker felt that it was probably "too late in life" to start looking for alternate employment for this woman.

It is to be expected that people's past experiences frame the way they view their options. As already noted, people who have been segregated from everyday life have limited experiences and consequently are likely to have a narrow view of the options. As well, after years of segregation, one's initial experiences in the community can cause considerable distress if they prove to be negative. Negative outcomes serve to dampen a person's expectations and thoughts about possible alternatives. One woman who had lost her previous job in the community had difficulty imagining anything beyond the job she currently held:

Well, I just take one day at a time, like see, because I knew I was laid off the other place. We're just taking one day at a time and see how things go. Just see how things go, and I'm not rushing it.

Self-worth

Studies have shown that work is a "critical variable in the way we feel about ourselves" (Matson & Rusch, 1986, p. 334). The participants in our study reported, and people around them confirmed, that they had gained a greater sense of self-worth as an outcome of the supported employment experience. Participants felt they were making a valuable contribution in the workplace and they were proud of what they were doing. Indicators of self-worth were contained in the comments people made about themselves and their work. For instance:

I know what to do. That's why [my support worker] doesn't have to help because she knows that I'm good at doing things like that.

One man told us:

I am sort of like the expert on how to do bridging. I can set it up and try it till it's perfect.

Parents and family members were generally very aware of the changes the employment experience had brought to the individual's self-worth. One parent commented on the dramatic change she had noticed in her son:

Like, it's a whole new ball game. He was brought out of that situation and yet his reaction was that he really liked being out with what he called "normal people," so there was an adjustment, I'd say, quite an adjustment for him to make, but it has brought him up, his self-esteem is up.

Many people cited demonstrations of increased independence as illustrations of the way in which people's increased self-worth manifested itself. One woman noted that in the case of her sister:

I think she's probably a lot more independent. I don't think she comes to me for as many things any more. She can handle basically most situations. So I think it's probably made her feel a lot more secure.

It was evident that people valued the fact that they were involved in the same sort of working activities as their fellow citizens and this, in turn, enhanced their sense of self-worth. One woman told us that although she had initially needed a lot of support from her support worker, she now felt quite competent and was quite able to work alone, as well as make a significant contribution in the workplace. She told us with some pride, "I know what I'm doing and I also train other people." This woman's friend elaborated on the changes she had observed:

I don't think she likes to be considered different from other people and I think working in a regular job, she really enjoys that, and she feels more, I hate this word, but "normal." She just feels more accepted because everyone else, you know, gets up and goes to work and they have a regular job and I think she really enjoys doing that. She's proud of what she does and she talks about it all the time, whereas I don't think she would be too much into talking about what she did in the workshop, because that's not something that she was really proud of.

In her work on an emerging social role for people with mental handicaps, Lusthaus (1986) suggests:

An additional role that may be slowly emerging for persons with mental handicaps is a role in which they are seen not only as people who are similar to others, but as valuable people who can make a contribution to others (p. 24).

The findings of our research indicate this to be the case. As well, people appreciate the fact that they were needed, sometimes by customers and in other instances by coworkers.

People expressed appreciation at having an opportunity to take on the responsibility of a job. Particularly significant were those instances where the supported employees became so fully integrated in terms of how well they did their job, that they provided training and support to individuals who joined the organization after them. In several instances, the people who participated in our study had been in their present job for a considerable time and were enjoying some benefits of seniority. This was particularly the case in those work settings where turnover was quite high and other staff members had come and gone. One person had been working with the same firm for over three years, and during that time there had been a change of ownership. It happened that the new owner of the firm knew nothing of the fact that she was part of a supported employment program. She pointed out to us that she was actually providing him with support: "I'm giving him more support, because I know more than he does."

The Value of a Paycheque

Few people experienced any significant improvement in their economic well-being as a result of the supported employment experience. This is due to the disincentives which existed in the social assistance system and the wage structure of the competitive labour market. However, for some the expectation of enhanced economic well-being had been a factor in their decision to leave the sheltered workshop. One man described how the idea of earning more money than he had been able to in the workshop had influenced his decision to move into supported employment:

Everyone that came in [to the workshop] wanted to know if we wanted a job and nobody would say anything. At the time, I didn't really want it either. But then I was thinking, "Why not? \$30.00 a week isn't enough and I am still on the pension and it's not enough for what I need." So I said, "Well, why not?"

Once employed, everybody responded very positively to the fact that they were receiving a paycheque on a regular basis along with their coworkers in the employment situation. The impact was quite different from receiving a pension cheque in the mail. One woman commented:

I like to make money and better than \$30.00 I used to [make in the workshop], but since I've got this raise, now I'm happy I've got a little money. That's what I wanted, to be out and get more money.

The parent's pleasure that the woman was employed was somewhat qualified:

Financially she is almost worse off than she was before when she got all these little helps. When she gets her wage she is very happy, but . . . actually she's going backwards.

Those few people who had been able to move beyond minimum wage and who were employed full-time with benefit packages were more able to experience a greater degree of economic well-being and independence. One woman said "I love the money, that's great." Her mother noted that,

[S]he has her own telephone and her own telephone line. She paid for everything—she has her own waterbed, she paid for her stereo and all the decorating in her bedroom.

A young man who was making well above minimum wage had set himself the goal of purchasing a car in the future. His support worker pointed out that before this man had started supported employment he would not have thought about the possibility of purchasing a car, but he had now started to set aside money for that car, the purchase of which would further increase his independence.

Relationships

Supported employment agencies that participated in this study generally emphasized that one role of the support worker is to facilitate social interaction and relationships. However, we found that the very presence of a support worker in the work situation in some instances adversely affected social interaction. Whether or not a barrier was created by the presence of the support worker was very much dependent on the approach and style of the support worker as well as the culture of the workplace. Nisbet and Callahan (1987) have also commented on the fine line the support worker treads between facilitating and hindering social

integration of the supported employee in the workplace. They note the danger in focusing attention on the individual to the point where he or she is "seen as part of the agency rather than as part of the business" (p. 195).

In the case of one of our study participants, following training on the job by an employment support worker, a coworker was assigned by the employer to provide guidance to the individual and to act as a role model in terms of appropriate behaviour while on the job. This coworker took a special interest in the employee and appears to have acted as a mentor to him. We learned that this employee had developed strong relations with several of his coworkers who were advocating for him to the employer. His employment support worker reported to us that this person's coworkers provided moral support because they felt that on occasion his supervisor was not being fair to him. In this instance, the relationship between the employee and the mentor appears to have facilitated the employee's acceptance by and support from other coworkers.

For the people who participated in this study, often the fact that they were working in the community was seen as an opportunity to meet "new friends." Aside from two or three exceptions, few friendships developed with coworkers which extended to after-work activities. Participants frequently thought of their coworkers as their friends, but contact with these people was confined to the workplace. People who were supportive and talked to the individual at work were considered to be friends. One woman had established friendships with several of her coworkers which involved going out for lunch or dinner on a fairly regular basis. Another person had a very active social life much of which was attributable to relationships he had established in the workplace.

For a couple of people, the most significant relationship which had developed as a result of their supported employment experience was with their immediate supervisors. These relationships extended beyond working hours and included spending time with each other and with members of their supervisors' extended families on weekends and occasionally in the evenings. As one individual described it to us, it was his relationship with his supervisor which kept him coming back to work.

Study participants who lived in residential programs were likely to receive support for making connections and developing relationships within the community from a residential support worker. People who resided at home were more likely to fall between the cracks of the service system, however, and it was evident that social isolation and the absence of a residential support program usually went hand in hand.

Within one participating agency, a family resource worker provided assistance to adults living at home to connect with community-based recreation and leisure activities. Such a resource is most effective when vocational support workers become sufficiently involved in the lives of the people they support to recognize when an individual, who is not part of a residential program, is socially isolated outside the working environment. The implication here, of course, is that people are dependent in significant ways on the service system. As others have noted, it is especially relevant that we avoid fragmenting services and that employment support be sensitized to the larger picture of a person's life (Nisbet & Callahan, 1987; Stodden & Browder, 1986; Wehman & Kregel, 1984).

Supported employment has the potential to greatly enhance community and individual quality of life. As with any innovation, with experience we learn where we might make important adjustments. We conclude this paper by drawing from the above-noted process of supported employment and quality-of-life themes to identify those issues and concerns which have particularly significant implications for the future of supported employment.

CONCLUSIONS

Getting Beyond the Entry-level Job

We are entering an exciting new era as horizons open which a decade ago would not have been considered entirely realistic. However, this research suggests people are not being given the opportunity to move ahead in their careers and may in fact become locked-in to jobs which are not providing ongoing challenge or a chance for further growth and development.

Other researchers and supported employment agencies have found, as we did, that there is a tendency for supported employment opportunities to be concentrated in food services and janitorial work (Brickey, Campbell, & Browning, 1985; Rehabilitation Research and Training Centre, undated). The reason for this may be that these positions are relatively abundant and easy to find. However, McLoughlin et al. (1987) have commented that "sole reliance on the easiest-to-find entry-level positions does little to enhance the image traditionally attached to persons labelled 'severely handicapped'" (p. 15). Our data suggest that when people first move into competitive employment, food services may offer a solid footing from which to begin employment outside the sheltered workshop. The difficulty occurs when people are not afforded the opportunity to move on to an alternative either within that industry or in a different field. It is in this connection that we talk about people being locked-in.

Ascertaining job preference is complicated further when people have limited experience and knowledge of potential opportunities. As Seltzer (1978) notes, job satisfaction has a lot to do with how well the present compares with the past. Hence, when people's work history has been primarily confined to the workshop, satisfaction may well have more to do with the comparison between the workshop and the community experience, than it does the actual characteristics of the job. It should not be assumed, therefore, that expressions of satisfaction with one's current job mean that, given the opportunity, a person would not choose to do something else. What this suggests is that supported employment agencies need to be particularly diligent in pursuing with individuals a range of employment options within the community, as well as giving consideration to opportunities for advancing beyond the entry-level position.

The Financial Uncertainties

A major struggle for employees results from the complexities and uncertainties which characterize the social-assistance system. Employers, consumers, and families find the system confusing. It has presented disincentives and barriers to workforce participation especially for people with a disability who are unlikely to enter paid employment at anything more than minimum wage. These citizens do

not enjoy ready access to employer-sponsored benefit packages or pension schemes. It is clear that employers and employees must be kept informed by employment support workers of the interaction between earned income and disability allowances.

It is important to note that in mid-1989 the Government of Ontario announced changes to the welfare system which should have a positive impact on the lives of individuals in supported employment. For instance, as part of these changes, Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) premiums are to be eliminated, and the introduction of Supports to Employment Program (STEP) marks a significant beginning in removing disincentives to employment. Ideally, of course, continued restructuring of the social-assistance system would remove the anomalies and imbalances which have characterized the current welfare system.

Recommended Changes and Adjustments

In conclusion, this research has demonstrated that, while supported employment has clearly been accompanied by significant improvements in the lives of the people who participated in this study, there are certainly aspects of their employment situations which could be improved. Some of the difficulties people are facing, such as establishing job preference and securing a job which offers room for advancement, are experienced by many members of the population at large at the start of their working lives. However, other difficulties are specific to the implementation strategies used by supported employment agencies.

Based on what people reported to us about their experience with the process of supported employment and the impact of this in relation to their perception of quality of life, we recommend the following changes and adjustments:

- (1) Develop approaches to on-the-job training which are as unobtrusive as possible and actively support coworker involvement in ongoing training and support of the individual in the workplace.
- (2) Facilitate the development of greater involvement of employers/supervisors in direct communication with the employee as opposed to depending on the support worker to act as intermediary in communication between the employee and others in the workplace. Initially, this may require support workers to play an active role in supporting people in the workplace to become familiar and comfortable with work integration.
- (3) Develop strategies to facilitate coworkers becoming mentors to their fellow employees. This will require a vigorous effort from supported employment agency personnel to facilitate the development of coworker support and social relations between the employee and other people in the workplace.
- (4) Ensure that as part of their mandate, supported employment agencies invest in individual explorations of job preference and choice. This should also involve *ongoing* consideration with individuals of whether their job choices have changed and whether they are moving in directions with which they feel comfortable and satisfied.
- (5) In the absence of a wage structure and social-assistance system which ensures people can enjoy the fruits of their labour in comfort and dignity alongside their fellow citizens, ensure that people in supported employment are af-

forded the best possible alternative in terms of their remuneration and access to income supplements. This is especially relevant when people do not enjoy equal access to full benefit packages within the workplace.

Perhaps it should not be surprising that we encountered some concerns related to the structure and process of supported employment, particularly given the relative "youth" of supported employment in this country. As with most innovations in human services, the transition from segregated to integrated settings presents everyone with new challenges and requires adjustments in policy and practice. We are optimistic, however, that with the adjustments recommended above, an increasing number of people with developmental handicaps will be afforded the opportunity to engage in meaningful work in the competitive labour force, which has significant implications for improving not only individual but also community quality of life.

RESUME

On fait état, dans cet article, des résultats d'une recherche qualitative sur l'emploi protégé. L'étude avait pour but d'examiner le processus par lequel les gens affectés d'un handicap de développement entraient dans des emplois protégés, pour ensuite obtenir des emplois réguliers; elle visait aussi à évaluer la qualité de vie de ces individus. La qualité de vie de tous les participants fut considérablement améliorée, comme résultat de cette expérience d'emplois protégés. L'étude a permis d'identifier également plusieurs zones de problèmes et des stratégies pour améliorer le soutien à l'emploi, en particulier en offrant une assistance discrète dans le milieu de travail et en facilitant l'intégration sociale des employés.

REFERENCES

- Barnow, B.S. (1986). Evaluating employment and training programs. *Evaluation and Program Planning*, 9, 63-72.
- Bellamy, G.T., Rhodes, L.E., Mank, D.M., & Albin, J.M. (1988). *Supported employment: A community implementation guide*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.
- Bellamy, G.T., Wilcox, B., Rose, H., & McDonnell, J. (1985). Education and career preparation for youth with disabilities. *Journal of Adolescent Health Care*, 6(2), 125-135.
- Bercovici, S. (1983). *Barriers to normalization*. Baltimore, MD: University Park Press.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective & method*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Bogdan, R., & Taylor, S.J. (1975). *Introduction to qualitative research methods*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Brickey, M.P., Campbell, K.M., & Browning, L.J. (1985). A five-year follow-up of sheltered workshops' employees placed in competitive jobs. *Mental Retardation*, 23(2), 67-73.
- British Columbians for Mentally Handicapped People. (1984). *Vocational front runners: Innovative options within B.C.*. Vancouver: Author.
- Brown, L., Shiraga, B., Ford, A., Nisbet, J., VanDeventer, P., Sweet, M., York, J., & Loomis, R. (1983). *Teaching severely handicapped students to perform meaningful work in non-sheltered vocational environments*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin (mimeo).
- Brown, R.I., Bayer, M.B., & MacFarlane, C. (1985). *Rehabilitation programs study:*

- Project #4558-29-4; interim phase I report.* Ottawa: National Welfare Grants Program, Health and Welfare.
- Canadian Mental Health Association. (1984a). *Work and well-being: The changing realities of employment.* Toronto: Author.
- Canadian Mental Health Association. (1984b). *Employment opportunities for people labeled as psychiatrically disabled—a discussion paper.* Toronto: Author.
- Cartan, D. (1984). *Students at work—Leeds and Grenville.* Brockville, ON: Brockville Association for Community Living.
- Cooley, E.L., Sewell, D.R., & Rich, C.I. (1985). Job and interpersonal need satisfaction: An assessment of disabled sheltered workshop employees. *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 51(4), 38-40.
- Glasser, B., & Strauss, L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory.* New York: Aldine.
- Hutchison, P., Lord, J., Savage, H., & Schnarr, A. (1985). *Listening.* Toronto: Canadian Mental Health Association.
- Kappel, B. (1985). Five challenges for the future: A personal perspective. *Mental Retardation*, 35(3), 14-20.
- Landesman, S. (1986, June). Quality of life and personal life satisfaction: Definition and measurement issues. *Mental Retardation*, 4(3), 141-143.
- Lusthaus, E. (1986). Making a contribution: An emerging social role for persons with a mental handicap. *Entourage*, 1(2), 24-31.
- Matson, J.L., & Rusch, F.R. (1986). Quality of life: Does competitive employment make a difference? In F.R. Rusch (Ed.), *Competitive employment issues & strategies* (pp. 331-337). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- McLoughlin, C.S., Garner, J.B., & Callahan, M. (1987). *Getting employed, staying employed.* Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.
- Metropolitan Toronto Association for Community Living and the Metropolitan Toronto School Board. (1988). *Career patterns and vocational/community adjustment of adult mentally handicapped persons employed competitively.* Toronto: Authors.
- Moseley, C.R. (1988). Job satisfaction research: Implications for supported employment. *Journal of the Association for the Severely Handicapped*, 13(3), 211-219.
- Nisbet, J., & Callahan, M. (1987). Achieving success in integrated workplaces. In S.J. Taylor, D. Biklen, & J. Knoll (Eds.), *Community integration for people with severe disabilities* (pp. 184-201). New York: Teachers College, Columbia University.
- Patton, M.Q. (1980). *Qualitative evaluation methods.* London: Sage.
- Perrin, B. (1986). *Trends and innovations regarding employment for people with handicaps.* Toronto: Burt Perrin Associates.
- Prince Edward Island Department of Health and Social Services. (1986). *Project P.R.O.V.E.* Charlottetown: Author.
- Rehabilitation Research and Training Centre Newsletter. (undated). Richmond, VA: Rehabilitation Research and Training Centre, 3(2).
- Rusch, F. (Ed.). (1986). *Competitive employment issues and strategies.* Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.
- Sandys, J. (1987). Issues in supported work. *Entourage*, 2(4), 12-15.
- Seltzer, M. (1978). *Retarded adults as workers: The development of competence.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Brandeis, Waltham, MA.
- Shelton, C. (1983). An alternative employment model. *Mental Retardation*, 34(1), 28-31.
- Statistics Canada. (1988, May 31). *The health and activity limitation survey.* Ottawa: Author.
- Stodden, R.A., & Browder, P.M. (1986, March). Community based competitive employment preparation of developmentally disabled persons: A program description and evaluation. *Education and Training of the Mentally Retarded*, 21(1), 43-53.
- Symington, D.C. (1983). Integration—are we ready? *Rehabilitation Digest*, 14(2), 2-4.
- Wehman, P. (1988). Supported employment: Toward equal employment opportunities for

persons with severe disabilities. *Mental Retardation*, 26(6), 357-361.

Wehman, P., & Kregel, J. (1984). *A supported work approach to competitive employment of individuals with moderate and severe handicaps*. Richmond, VA: Rehabilitation Research and Training Centre, School of Education, Virginia Commonwealth University (mimeo).

Wehman, P., & Moon, S. (1982). *Critical values in employment programs for persons with developmental disabilities*. Richmond, VA: Rehabilitation Research and Training Centre, School of Education, Virginia Commonwealth University (mimeo).