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Supported employment: Equal opportunities for severely disabled men and women

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Introduction

She is paralysed, she cannot speak, she obviously has severe intellectual limitations; but she holds down a regular job. Improbable? Much less than it used to be. True, until recently men and women with a severe disability were considered untrainable and unemployable. No funds were "wasted" on their vocational education. Now, however, they can be found side by side with non-disabled workers, joining them as productive citizens in the open labour market.

Increasing such opportunities is the objective of a Convention that was adopted unanimously by the 1983 International Labour Conference. The ILO Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Convention, 1983 (No. 159), requires that appropriate vocational rehabilitation measures be made available to *all* categories of disabled persons. Focusing on the equalization of opportunities for disabled persons and their integration within the community, the Convention establishes guidelines on providing vocational training and employment for severely disabled people.

This article examines the "supported employment" approach, which tries systematically to integrate severely disabled men and women into the open labour market. After describing the target population, we shall outline the specific support required, along with the benefits, risks and problems involved. Examples from a few industrialized countries, demonstrating the viability of training and employing severely disabled people, will illustrate the new approach. The activities described in this article are in line with the goals of the ILO Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (Disabled Persons) Recommendation, 1983 (No. 168), which calls for "research and the possible application of its results to various types of disability in order to further the participation of disabled persons in ordinary working life".

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Severe disability

Who are these severely disabled men and women, where do they live, what do they do?

However much their individual situations may differ, they share at least some of the following characteristics:

- *restricted mobility:* not only may walking be impossible, but movement may be restricted to the use of a few fingers for carrying out such tasks as pushing the button of a machine;
- *limited self-care:* support is needed for dressing, eating, toiletting, etc.;
- *communication difficulties:* only non-verbal communication is possible;
- *multiple sensory impairments:* additional disabilities, such as blindness, deafness or intellectual impairment, which make it even more difficult for them to be actively involved in the world of work;
- *inappropriate social behaviour:* they may be withdrawn or, alternatively, hyperactive. Either kind of behaviour causes problems in relating to others.

The first four characteristics are usually connected directly with the handicapping condition. The problems of acceptable social behaviour, however, are largely due to the living conditions of severely disabled men and women, the majority of whom still live in restrictive environments such as institutions containing several hundred residents or attend day activity programmes that offer only a limited amount of teaching and training. Even more important, these restrictive environments isolate disabled people from their communities, thus minimizing opportunities for independence, productivity and social integration. As such people are grouped together, the consequences of their existing impairments are multiplied and their marginalization is reinforced. Vocational training and work activities are rarely part of the daily programme for people with severe disabilities, since it is considered self-evident that they are unfit for work.

In recent years some pilot programmes, particularly in the United States, but also in Canada, Australia and a few European countries, have demonstrated that severely disabled people are capable of work. These programmes are based on the premise that such people can be productive and integrated members of their community if they receive the necessary training and support (Schalock and Kiernan, 1990). The aim of this article is to show how this principle is applied under the supported employment approach. Although research has so far concentrated on programmes for persons with mental retardation, supported employment is also relevant to people with all other forms of severe disability.

Supported employment and its objectives

Supported employment for persons with severe disabilities may be defined as competitive, employer-paid work in integrated work settings in

which the necessary ongoing support is provided for individuals who have not traditionally experienced competitive employment. The four components of this definition may be refined as follows:

- *Competitive work* is work performed on a full- or part-time basis, averaging at least 20 hours per week, for which the employee receives fair pay.
- *Integrated work settings* are those in which non-handicapped workers predominate.
- *Ongoing support* is that needed, on a continuing basis, to support and maintain the person with severe disabilities in employment.
- *Persons with severe disabilities* are those who, because of the severity of their handicaps, would not traditionally be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. As observed by Wehman (1988), these individuals typically exhibit significant levels of mental retardation, severe physical or sensory handicapping conditions, autism, severe traumatic brain injury and/or a history of chronic mental illness.

The main objectives, then, are to enable people with a severe disability to be employed in an integrated employment environment, to obtain appropriate training, together with ongoing support to maintain employment, and to receive compensation (wages) and benefits equal to those of other workers with the same job responsibilities.

A second set of objectives consists in finding openings for supported employment within an integrated employment environment; providing the appropriate training and support to ensure the best balance between a person's capabilities and interests and the job requirements; lobbying for equal wages and fringe benefits; increasing the number of disabled people employed in integrated employment settings at commensurate wages; reducing dependence on welfare payments and other services; and maximizing tax contributions.

The achievement of these inter-related goals would clearly benefit not only the disabled man or woman, but society as a whole.

So far, supported employment has taken three main forms: individual placement, enclaves (small units of disabled persons working in a host company) and mobile work crews. The characteristics of each model are summarized in table 1.

Apart from the non-profit nature of the supporting agency, integration and support are the common denominators of the three models; the various levels of training and support require, at least for the initial period, the availability of more staff than in traditional vocational rehabilitation programmes. Supported employment programmes are typically run by a municipal agency, a non-governmental organization or a university-affiliated programme and – in the United States – funded by a combination of federal, state and local tax money.

Table 1. Comparison of organization and procedures in three supported employment models

Criterion	Individual placement	Enclave	Mobile work crew
Organizational strategy and business base	Non-profit support to individuals and employers Varied types of jobs	Non-profit support to host company Manufacturing companies	Non-profit Crews operate from a van Rural Service contracts
No. of workers per site	1 per job	6-8	5 per crew
Intensity of support	Low. Continuous initially, dropping to no more than 1 hour a day after several months	Medium. Continuous and long term	Medium. Continuous and long term
Training	Individual training for up to 4 months on: – job tasks – non-work behaviour in and around job setting	Individual training on: – production tasks – non-work behaviour in job setting	Individual training on: – service tasks – community integration activities
Supervision	2-3 supervisors for 12 employees in separate businesses	1 supervisor for 6-8 employees in host company Host company assigns "foster worker" as back-up to supervisor	1 supervisor for 5 employees Continuous presence of 1 supervisor on service jobs for all 5 employees
Implementation issues	Availability of local jobs Matching employee needs with available support	Availability of host company	Availability of profitable, repeating service contracts

Source: Adapted from Mank, Rhodes and Bellamy (1986).

Components of supported employment

Experience over the past five years with supported employment has pinpointed a number of ways in which traditional vocational rehabilitation programmes have to be adapted if they are to serve severely disabled people successfully. The five main activities required for the implementation of a supported employment programme are:

- establishment of an innovative programme structure (sometimes called the "rationale for change");
- identification of employment opportunities and communication with possible employers;
- teaching of skills needed for a specific employment opportunity;
- organization of the support necessary to meet the employer's expectations;
- assessment of the employee's performance and the satisfaction given to both employee and employer.

Experience to date also suggests that the most important role in such activities is taken by the employment specialist (or "job coach"). Some of the qualities required of a job coach, as well as his major functions and responsibilities in the field of supported employment, are summarized in table 2.

As table 2 shows, job coaches are involved in job development, job analysis, client assessment, job accommodation (adapting the job to the client's abilities), training, supervision, assistance and support for long-term employment, employer relations, case management, counselling and transportation, thus requiring skills which go beyond those normally displayed by rehabilitation staff or social workers. The job coach needs skills in management and public relations, as well as the usual training tasks, for successfully placing and maintaining a severely disabled person in a job on the open market.

Successful supported employment

Characteristics of effective supported employment programmes, judged on the basis of their positive employment outcomes for a wide range of diagnostic groups (mental retardation, traumatic brain injury, chronic mental illness, physical impairment), were identified by a recent study in the United States (National Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, 1989). Each selected programme was visited by an assessment team and evaluated on a number of indicators including programme philosophy and values, quality of life, appropriateness of support, organizational structure and safeguards. The common features contributing to the success of the 16 evaluated agencies are summarized in table 3.

These 12 points indicate the comprehensiveness of a quality programme. They underline the importance of the existence of a range of formal

Table 2. Job coach qualities, functions and responsibilities

Qualities required
- Commitment to integrated employment
- Determination to get disabled person accepted as a valuable individual
- Dedication to client's personal growth and development
- Attention to detail, e.g. provision of efficient transport

Planning and implementing the rehabilitation programme
- Identifies employment opportunities and determines necessary skills or performance requirements
- Analyses client's employment interest and attitudes
- Develops individual performance goals and behavioural objectives
- Applies business principles rather than welfare approach in placing clients
- Collaborates with other employment specialists, employer, client and parents in developing and implementing an individualized plan
- Uses current habilitation strategies, including skill training techniques, prosthetics and job accommodation
- Uses ongoing employee assistance programmes and other support systems to ensure long-term employment

Programme evaluation
- Designs and implements a system for monitoring employee progress
- Collects data on the disabled person's employment (wages per hour, average hours per week, weeks worked, taxes paid, benefits), level of integration, hours of job support (explained below), and job movement patterns

Source: Adapted from Schalock and Kiernan (1990).

Table 3. Commonalities among agencies with successful supported employment practices

1. Strong leadership, organizational development and philosophical commitment to supported employment.
2. High levels of client family involvement.
3. Provision of a variety of jobs that reflect the range of opportunities available in the community.
4. Use of individual placement, which permits better social integration and job matches.
5. Commitment by disabled employees to the supported employment concept and the specific job held.
6. Assessment techniques that include job analysis and job matching.
7. Use of supports such as assistance from co-workers, provision of transport and reasonable job accommodation.
8. Effective on-site job training of employment specialists for functions and activities listed in table 2.
9. Business advisory councils or boards including local business persons who assist with marketing.
10. Non-intrusive job coaching and job support that is phased out as soon as is practical.
11. Good connections with university experts and other consultants.
12. Collaborative efforts among professionals, employers, school personnel, state agency staff, persons with disabilities and their families.

Source: Adapted from National Association of Rehabilitation Facilities (1989).

employment options in a strong economy (3, 4), well-established support services to the programme (7, 9, 11, 12) and the above-mentioned "rationale for change" (1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12). This rationale can be seen as the key to new opportunities. Only through a change of attitudes will severely disabled women and men be accepted as trainees, employees and co-workers.

It is equally important to establish success criteria on the individual level. A four-step strategy to assess and improve the performance of a severely disabled person in a supported employment programme has been used by many agencies in the United States. The first step involves evaluating the employee's existing independence on the job, after which further instruction is given on adaptability in the workplace and co-workers are encouraged to provide assistance, until finally the employee needs little or no outside supervision, but can react independently to the supervisor's instructions, signals and other work-related stimuli. Greater independence and less need for support are regarded as the key determinants of success. The main aspects of this strategy are summarized in table 4.

The quality of supported employment is, to a large extent, determined by factors within the employer's control. In assessing an employer, it should be asked (Schalock and Hill, 1986) whether the disabled man or woman is provided with:

- adequate and fair compensation;
- safe and healthy working conditions;
- the same work, lunch and break areas as other employees;
- normal work schedules;
- a variety of jobs;
- opportunities for continued self-development;
- a proper balance between his or her interests and capabilities and the requirements of the job.

All these factors except the last depend on the employer's readiness to meet the needs of a severely disabled person.

The following indicators (Schalock, 1988; Schalock, McGaughey and Kiernan, 1989) are also crucial to the success of a severely disabled person in supported employment: (1) participant characteristics (age, sex, disability level); (2) setting prior to placement (e.g. day-care centre or sheltered workshop); (3) type of employment environment; (4) employment data (working hours, wages); (5) occupational category (e.g. bench work, clerical service); (6) level of integration; (7) hours of job support; and (8) job movement patterns. These indicators, which include some factors that depend on the employee and others that depend on the employer, should be self-explanatory, with the possible exceptions of employment environments and job support. *Employment environments* comprise the following:

- *Sheltered employment.* Employment utilizing work environments where only persons with disabilities are employed and where payment is customarily at less than the minimum wage.

Table 4. A four-step strategy to promote employee independence

1. Evaluate employee independence on the job [1]

Performance

- *(a)* Works independently
- *(b)* Completes all assigned tasks
- *(c)* Attends to job tasks reliably
- *(d)* Meets company standards for quality of work
- *(e)* Meets company standards for pace of work
- *(f)* Follows company procedures
- *(g)* Maintains good attendance and punctuality
- *(h)* Takes care of equipment and materials
- *(i)* Maintains acceptable appearance

Adaptability

- *(a)* Obtains/returns materials needed for tasks
- *(b)* Adjusts pace of work according to job demands
- *(c)* Works safely
- *(d)* Follows a schedule
- *(e)* Manages time appropriately
- *(f)* Is able to adjust to changes in routine
- *(g)* Solves work-related problems independently

Social skills

- *(a)* Follows directions
- *(b)* Accepts criticism
- *(c)* Asks for assistance when necessary
- *(d)* Gets along with co-workers
- *(e)* Interacts appropriately with customers

2. Teach or reinforce employee adaptability [2]

- *(a)* Decision-making
- *(b)* Independent performance
- *(c)* Self-evaluation
- *(d)* Adjustment

3. Facilitate assistance by co-workers to: [3]

- *(a)* Report on effectiveness of instructional strategies
- *(b)* Collect subjective evaluations
- *(c)* Implement training procedures
- *(d)* Observe and report on social progress
- *(e)* Ensure adequate behaviour in the work environment

4. Phase out external controls

- *(a)* Teach employee to respond to specific changes in the work environment and recognize work-related stimuli such as signs and symbols
- *(b)* Encourage wider application ("generalization") of the social and work skills learnt
- *(c)* Shift supervision to co-workers or regular supervisors

[1] Adapted from Lagomarcino, Hughes and Rusch (1989); Rusch and Hughes (1988). [2] Adapted from Mithaug, Martin, Agran and Rusch (1988). [3] Adapted from Rusch and Minch (1988).

- *Transitional training/employment.* Employment which provides time-limited support leading to competitive employment – e.g. work/employment training stations, on-the-job training, or enclaves – where payment may be at less than the minimum wage.
- *Competitive employment.* Unsubsidized employment where payment is at or above the minimum wage (including certain enclaves, work crews, and employment in regular jobs where time-limited follow-up services are provided).

Job support refers to the training, supervision, personal assistance (e.g. in dressing, toiletting, eating), support (e.g. in communicating with co-workers), transport and case management (e.g. in dealing with the funding agency, health services, etc.) needed to enable the disabled person to find and retain a job. Ideally the amount of support should be phased out. For severely disabled people, however, at least a minimum of support will always be required.

Cost-effectiveness

A number of studies (e.g. Noble and Conley, 1987; Schalock, McGaughey and Kiernan, 1989; Wehman and Hill, 1989) have shown that supported employment programmes can be very cost-effective. An even more recent study (Wehman and Kregel, 1990) on 109 persons with severe mental retardation in 90 selected communities in the United States over a period of 12 months found 81.5 per cent of them continuously employed in the open labour market. On average they worked 22 hours per week, their mean wages being $3.65 per hour.

Table 5 gives some data on the cost-effectiveness of a supported employment programme for which records have been kept over a number of years. It is evident from the taxpayer benefit/cost ratio – the ratio between the financial savings to the taxpayer (taxes paid by the disabled persons now employed, reduced welfare payments, or "SSI reduction", and reduced alternative programme[1] cost) and the additional costs to the taxpayer (project expenses and the tax credits offered to employers who hire a severely disabled person, or "TJTC cost") – that supported employment programmes can over time result in a significant return on investment. The data indicate, however, that start-up costs are high; cost efficiency could be reached only by the third year of this particular programme, in 1981.

More comprehensive research is required to determine the long-term effects and benefits of supported employment. So far, only a limited number

[1] I.e. the traditional segregated settings for persons with special disabilities providing either occupational therapy (e.g. residential institutions, state hospitals, day care programmes), non-productive work (work activity centres) or non-competitive employment (sheltered workshops).

Table 5. Incremental effects of time on the benefits accruing to taxpayers from a supported employment project

Fiscal year (July-June)	Clients served [1]	Benefits ($)			Costs ($)		Taxpayer benefit/ cost ratio
		Taxes paid	SSI reduction	Alternative programme cost	TJTC cost	Project expenses	
1979	16	10 408.05	–	33 577.83	–	230 391.44	0.19
1980	41	53 467.82	7 482.61	145 427.75	21 679.48	239 013.15	0.79
1981	59	73 630.05	45 070.01	202 578.40	36 485.10	209 708.13	1.30
1982	72	76 313.55	55 886.98	244 729.97	35 867.29	194 170.31	1.64
1983	86	88 807.27	72 557.24	280 348.55	58 134.90	182 651.91	1.83
1984	99	104 215.21	100 769.52	339 340.36	43 906 89	174 572.25	2.49
1985	104	96 027.24	113 409.23	344 414.96	49 149.16	137 384.07	2.97
1986 [2]	112	88 408.47	107 628.31	332 338.04	52 873.14	127 270.75	2.93

SSI = Supplemental Security Income. TJTC = Targeted Jobs Tax Credit.

[1] This is the number of persons receiving any job support during the year shown. In years after 1979 there are duplicate counts (persons receiving job support in more than one year). [2] Data for 1986 are incomplete; 10 of 12 months are reported here.

Source: Adapted from Wehman and Hill (1989).

of severely handicapped people have been placed in supported employment environments (Schalock, McGaughey and Kiernan, 1989). Given support corresponding to their individual needs, more women and men with a severe disability, whether mental retardation (Wehman and Hill, 1989), psychiatric disability (Fabian and Wiedefeld, 1989) or deaf-blindness combined with an intellectual disability (Griffin and Lowry, 1989), would have a chance to participate in the open labour market.

Supported employment in practice

Following this brief introduction to supported employment, we cite a number of examples from various countries to provide an overview of the "state of the art".

United States

A highly regarded supported employment programme is offered by Mid-Nebraska Mental Retardation Services. This is a community-based programme providing supported living and employment opportunities to over 300 adults with mental retardation. The programme uses all three models described in table 1, has trained its job coaches to perform the functions summarized in table 2 and has implemented the activities mentioned in table 3. Objective outcome data from this and similar supported employment programmes have been presented elsewhere (Schalock, McGaughey and Kiernan, 1989).

The following two brief case studies reflect the significant subjective and objective changes noted in persons with severe disabilities who are employed in a supported employment environment.

Judy Miller

Judy Miller is 46 and has Down's syndrome. Staff working with Judy characterized her as being lost in the crowd. She did not communicate other than by pointing to pictures in her picture book. She never smiled, continually rocked back and forth and made an obviously unhappy whining sound for hours on end. She drew back from people and did not want anyone touching her.

Her work in the sheltered workshop, attaching fishing weights to wires, did not interest her; in fact, staff would have to work with her to get her even to look at what she was doing. Often Judy intentionally poked her fingers on the pointed ends of the wire until they were sore.

When a group of five persons was selected to form a work crew outside the workshop doing the same work they had been doing before, Judy was one of those selected to make the move.

Staff who were once disappointed with Judy are now excited to talk about her progress. The crying and rocking, the poking of her fingers have stopped. She pays attention to what she is doing. Her salary as a part-time employee has increased from $1.25 (sheltered employment) to $2.26 (supported employment) per hour.

Judy now smiles and hums happily as she works. Recently she came to work and forgot to bring her communication aid, her picture book. In the past she would

have been completely distraught until someone went to get her "lifeline". Staff did not realize that Judy was trying to tell them her book was at home, but she kept pointing and gesturing and finally, reaching up and gently cupping the face of the job coach, was able to get the message across. Having explained what was missing, Judy went back to her work and was able to make it through the day without her book.

The communication, the touching, the smiling, the willingness to show what she wants and the determination to get her point across are all qualities that have developed since she left the workshop and began working with the smaller group. Judy Miller is not lost in the crowd any more.

Ron Blakly

Ron Blakly, who is 50 years old, had severe behaviour problems. He was so withdrawn that he did not want to get up in the morning, did not want to work, would say nothing but "yes" or "no", was not interested in being involved in his community, seldom smiled and seemed depressed.

Ron seems to have a new lease of life since moving from the sheltered workshop to an enclave where he, along with four other people, folds filters which are used in gathering soil samples. He runs to meet the van which takes him to work each morning. A couple of times the driver was late and Ron phoned to see where he was. He seems very motivated and actually chooses to work, which is a dramatic change from his workshop behaviour.

Ron is all business when he gets to work. He is immediately ready to start, and even hurries back from break to begin folding filters again. When he was working in the workshop, staff continually had to find ways to get him to work. Now Ron is keeping others up to scratch. When he sees one of his co-workers sitting idle, he urges them to "get busy".

Ron Blakly obviously feels better about himself now. He spends more time walking, cycling, working in his yard and looking after his figure and appearance. His salary has increased from $1.51 (sheltered employment) to $3.16 (supported employment) per hour.

These two examples illustrate the change supported employment can make to severely disabled men and women.

United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, the Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children and Adults (MENCAP) has developed the Pathway Employment Service. This scheme introduces employers mainly to mentally retarded persons, many of them severely disabled, who have previously been given individual training focused not only on directly relevant job skills, but also on the social skills that disabled people need in order to work as self-reliantly and independently as possible with their co-workers.

Employers who hire a disabled person are reimbursed their expenses for a trial period of up to 12 weeks before they need fully commit themselves. Employers nominate a "foster worker", who supports the new employee and helps him or her to adjust to the challenge of open employment. Experience has shown that the foster workers, who receive a small payment for their efforts, are the key to the success of this scheme.

Pathway operates a continuing back-up service providing support to employees, employers and others. This enables possible difficulties to be

tackled early. As of 31 May 1990, 2,152 mentally retarded persons, 191 of them having a severe retardation, had been placed in open employment. They work in a variety of jobs, e.g. as industrial assembly workers, domestic assistants, warehouse assistants, supermarket workers, industrial cleaners and bakery workers. As they are paid the same salary as other workers with the same job responsibilities, they enjoy a social status previously unknown to people with this degree of disability.

Although no in-depth research on the Pathway programme has been undertaken so far, a few characteristics stand out, as in previous examples of successful supported employment, notably the importance of strong leadership, individual placement, co-worker support and on-site job training (see table 3).

Italy

An important project has been set up in the north-western Italian town of Genoa with the principal goal of integrating disabled workers in open employment. It serves approximately 300 mentally disabled persons, including those with severe mental retardation or chronic psychological disabilities (e.g. autism, schizophrenia). The philosophy underlying the project is that young people with mental handicaps, including severe disabilities, should wherever possible be placed in regular rather than sheltered employment settings.

The project design provides for (1) an extensive work evaluation and training process to identify and develop the social skills and good working habits crucial to employment success; (2) the use of co-workers to provide initial job training and ongoing support to project participants; and (3) a mediating role for the project between the world of moderately and severely disabled persons and their families on the one hand, and the ordinary world of work on the other.

The following short description of the Genoa project relies heavily on the research undertaken by Martin H. Gerry for the Centre of Educational Research and Innovation of the OECD.

> The central goal of the project is to prepare, place and sustain young persons with moderate and severe mental disabilities in integrated and compensated employment. . . . The project uses a series of multi-disciplinary professional teams to assess, train and support the employment of disabled participants. Particular emphasis is placed on the thorough preparation of each disabled person for work responsibilities, careful selection of an initial, "probationary" job, and intensive ongoing attention to the psycho-social dimensions of the proposed working environment, particularly with respect to the attitudes and potential support of co-workers.
>
> [It] has established a series of crucial linkages among public agencies, unions, employers and the families of disabled participants. The project relies upon co-workers rather than professional staff to provide job skill training and believes that employer participation in and support for the project will only be assured if employers directly experience the project's success. (Gerry, 1989, pp. 32-33.)

Following selection of suitable candidates and individual assessment the Special Transition Team (as job coaches are known in the Genoa project) decides, in consultation with the participant and the participant's family, whether "the participant is able to enter a one-year trial work period leading to sustained, competitive and integrated employment in the private sector". This is achieved by 80 per cent of the young people, while another 10 per cent enter the project's Public Sector Strategy, which "provides sustained, compensated and integrated employment in public agencies as the project's short-term objective, with transfer to the Private Sector Strategy as a long-term goal".

Special Transition Team members take pains to match the participant with an appropriate job. Once this has been done, all the parties enter into a one-year trial work contract, under which the project "fully reimburses the employer for the participant's wages (through a 'special grant' programme) and the employer agrees to subsidize the job training and support activities of co-workers". If at the end of the contract period the employer decides to employ the participant on a permanent basis, the project continues to provide support through a field action group (in co-operation with the co-workers), while the employer assumes full responsibility for the salary and benefits paid to the participant. If the employer decides against offering employment, the Special Transition Team can negotiate a trial work contract with another employer.

By several important criteria of programme effectiveness (e.g. type of work performed, compensation and other benefits, integration at work, independence and personal and social behaviour), the young people served by the Genoa project have experienced a high degree of success, 90 per cent achieving steady, compensated and integrated employment in either the private or the public sector. This promising success rate is, as mentioned above (see table 2), to a large extent dependent on the work of the job coach, or Special Transition Team member. Obviously the support necessary to maintain the employment of a severely disabled person requires more than a financial allocation; it needs a person who takes a personal interest in creating equal opportunities for men and women with a severe disability.

Conclusions

Supported employment is a promising approach to opening up new opportunities for severely disabled men and women. Through its individualized approach, it offers new options to persons who have previously been excluded from the labour market. First evaluations have shown that supported employment programmes can bring benefits not only for the disabled person, but for employers and taxpayers as well. In spite of this positive assessment, however, there are several pitfalls which will have to be avoided.

First, a job given to a severely disabled person under a supported employment scheme can be filled by any other worker. This means that an employer has to have a particular motivation to hire a disabled person instead of a non-disabled one. Besides a positive attitude, particular incentives may be required to convince an employer to hire a person with a severe disability. Such an incentive might be a specific tax-credit, or the inducement offered by most quota schemes[2] whereby one severely disabled worker counts for several mildly disabled ones. In addition, some of the social security funds devoted to the care of severely disabled people might be better used to bring this group into the labour market.

Another prerequisite for success is that the supported employment agency should accept responsibility for the adaptation of the workplace and guarantee a clearly defined work output to meet the employer's business needs. The agency therefore has the dual responsibility of modifying, for example, a push-button printer so that it can be handled by a woman who can only move her head, and of ensuring, through training or direct support, that she operates the printer as often as is necessary to produce the required output.

Jobs given to severely disabled persons so far have been simple ones, such as bench work involving a limited number of tasks, clearing tables in a fast-food restaurant, carrying goods in supermarkets, filling bottles with pre-sorted pills in hospitals. Unskilled jobs like these, however, whether in factories, offices or the service sector, are the first to become redundant when labour costs rise. Indeed, jobs such as clearing tables or carrying supermarket customers' goods to their cars, which provide employment at minimum wages to disabled (and non-disabled) persons in the United States, have already largely disappeared in many European countries owing to the different structure of the service sector. This may foreshadow a low degree of job stability and, in the future, a reduction in the number of suitable jobs available. As technological change increases the possibilities of adapting workplaces to severely disabled people, it will also increase the possibilities of cutting back on costly human labour. Employers may then prefer employees who can be used more flexibly and do not require as much support as severely disabled men and women. Also, statistics indicate that at times of high unemployment employers, even in countries with a quota scheme, are less willing to hire disabled workers (Burkhauser and Hirvonen, 1989).

These difficulties should not detract from the importance of the new approach to assisting severely disabled people. Supported employment has

[2] A "quota" is a compulsion placed on employers to employ a given percentage of disabled persons. Quota schemes are in operation in France, the United Kingdom and Germany, among others. In Germany, for example, any employer, public or private, with more than 16 employees has to give 6 per cent of posts to persons registered as disabled. Non-compliance entails payment of a fine, which is spent on improved vocational rehabilitation and employment for disabled persons.

the potential for offering this marginalized population the opportunity to be integrated in the world of work. Over the next few years a slow rise in the number of integrated workplaces for severely disabled people can be expected. This will probably occur both in countries which have already adopted this approach (United States, United Kingdom, Italy) and in other industrialized countries which decide to join them. Resources should be allocated to setting up more programmes and strengthening existing ones. The individualized and flexible approach characteristic of supported employment could then even revolutionize vocational rehabilitation in general.

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