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Strategies for Improving Supported Employment Services for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Janelle L. Bailey

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2025

Abstract

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and Developmental Disabilities

by

Janelle L. Bailey

MA, CUNY School of Professional Studies, 2017

BA, CUNY Lehman College, 2010

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Human Services

Walden University

November 2025

Abstract

There is a growing need for supported employment services and improved programming among people with intellectual/developmental disabilities (I/DD). The research question for this study was; what are human service staff and administrators' experiences and perceptions of what is working well in supported employment programs, and how to improve the services offered to adults with I/DD in a northeastern county? The tenets of Kurt Lewin's change model form the theoretical framework for the study, to serve as a foundation for effective change. A force field analysis approach was used to gather narrative written data from open ended questionnaire responses to grasp staff-outlined factors that are believed to promote or hinder program changes, thus suggesting a solution-driven plan of action. Findings from the study further inform existing programs and indicated a) an identified need for enhancing staff and employer training and preparation for supporting I/DD job placement, b) additional funds needed to hire more staff, and c) a focus on whole person-centered services for I/DD clients. The findings may contribute to positive social change by improving employment independence for people with I/DD, enhancing service delivery outcomes provided by employment agencies, and promoting increased job training skills that will drive involvement in and collaborations with employers in the job market.

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Dedication

For my son, for his tiny hugs, endless cheers, and enormous heart. For allowing me to sacrifice portions of his play time to get assignments done. For my mother, for her kind, encouraging words. Her love, emotional and spiritual support fueled my resilience. For my family, friends, and coworkers, for their patience, and endless support that made this study possible.

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I would like to thank my son, my source of strength at such a young age. My determination to complete this capstone was a direct result of wanting you to see me succeed; to build your confidence and teach you to strive for excellence always. You cheer me on like no other, and I know I have made you proud.

A heartfelt thank you to my mother, without whom I could not complete this capstone. Thank you for your love, support, endless prayers, and for assisting with childcare when I needed to focus on this study. Thank you for the principles you instilled in me early on in life. This is for you, enjoy your shine.

I would also like to extend appreciation to the Walden faculty with whom I have engaged for various classes. Your combined lessons and words of encouragement helped make it possible to get me to the capstone stage. To my chair and doctoral committee, I thank you. Your patience and kindness on my journey taught me what building professional relationships is all about. Your honest review of my work helped build character and motivated me to improve my work.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Problem

Background of the Human Services Problem

The human services problem is a lack of adequate supported employment services to meet the varying needs of job seekers with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). The objective of this study is to understand the magnitude of the human services problem, using a force field analysis to examine human service staff and administrators' perceptions of supported employment services provided to adults with I/DD. Results of the analysis are evaluated to see how they align with the theoretical framework, and to determine if recommendations for improvement are needed.

There is an increasing need for improved supported employment services for people with intellectual/ developmental disabilities (I/DD) (Butterworth et al., 2024). While employment fosters independence, there are people within the United States, with I/DD, who lack access to paid jobs (Philips, 2023). Further research shows that people with intellectual / developmental disabilities in Westchester County, New York, face several barriers when utilizing a supported employment service to acquire jobs (Stone, 2023).

The supported employment model has grown in the United States over the last 40 years (Center on Community Living and Careers, 2022). A model that emerged in the 1980's, known as supported employment (Center on Community Living and Careers, 2022), was introduced as a substitute source of income, as sheltered workshops paid subminimum wage and were not beneficial to people with I/DD (Center on Community Living and Careers, 2022). Congress recognized that people with I/DD needed significant

help to access services and achieve independence, but they were not provided for under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Congress.gov). Hence, the implementation of the Developmental Disability Act of 1984, which outlined supported employment as:

Paid employment which (i) is for persons with developmental disabilities for whom competitive employment at or above the minimum wage is unlikely and who, because of their disabilities, need ongoing support to perform in a work setting; (ii) is conducted in a variety of settings, particularly work sites in which persons without disabilities are employed; and (iii) is supported by any activity needed to sustain paid work by persons with disabilities, including supervision, training, and transportation. (Congress.gov, n.d., Sec. 102, pg. 2665)

Guided by the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1986 (Congress.gov, n.d.), supported employment organizations promoted independence among people with I/DD, and helped actualize employment goals, according to the needs and level of functioning (Center on Community Living and Careers, 2022). Per this act, people with I/DD were assessed to determine necessary rehabilitative services, to include employment outcomes (Congress.gov, n.d.). In essence, supported employment organizations provided staff to help bridge the connection between people with I/DD who wanted to earn income and potential employers looking to fill vacancies. Using an evidence-based model called Individualized placement and support (IPS), people with I/DD and other comorbidities were assisted with accessing job opportunities in accordance with their behavioral health needs, skillset, choice, and overall wellbeing (Drake et al., 2021).

Over time, it became evident that service users had varied needs that required the consideration of optional employment support strategies (Center on Community Living and Careers, 2022). To introduce a more inclusive approach, Congress passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act in 2014, which incorporated customized employment as a part of supported employment, to aid those with more significant needs achieve employment outcomes (Center on Community Living and Careers, 2022). This policy advancement not only provided a more inclusive employment approach for people with I/DD but also created a pathway for organizations to receive funding to maintain services (Wehman, 2023). Support agencies like the Young Adult Institute (YAI), in New York state, adapted this model to better support services users with I/DD who had dreams of employment independence (YAI, 2021). The supported employment services provided by YAI has enabled people with I/DD to advance from earning sub-minimum wages in sheltered workshops to making competitive salaries in integrated settings (YAI, 2021). To date, the organization supports more than 450 people with I/DD in jobs across New York state (YAI, 2021).

Nonetheless, challenges persist. Though supported employment proved more successful than previous vocational options, there remains a disconnect between awareness of the supported employment needs of people with I/DD and securing jobs they can engage and maintain (Shankar et al., 2021). Researchers discovered the need for more significant training to help support staff adequately meet the needs of job seekers with I/DD (Shankar et al., 2021). Although the model offers considerable promise, support staff must be adequately prepared with effective strategies to successfully

connect individuals with I/DD to potential employers. Without proper employment search and placement support, service users who find jobs will experience difficulties applying their skills due to a lack of match (Shankar et al., 2021). Researchers also discovered potential employers lacked knowledge of people with I/DD, which resulted in misunderstandings perceived as rudeness, disregard, and unrealistic expectations (Shankar et al., 2021). Hence, there is a need for supported employment agencies to partner with and educate identified employers. Unless supported employment organizations invest in appropriate training implementation for both support staff and potential employers, service users will fail to gain jobs, maintain tenure, and will not achieve their employment goals (Shankar et al., 2021).

There is a deficiency in the provision of supported employment services, particularly in Westchester County, New York. Though the Supported employment model has evolved over the years, there are still barriers, such as a lack of access to paid employment (Philips, 2023) and low networking between supported employment agencies and community businesses (Shankar et al., 2021). Such barriers have prevented people with I/DD from gaining paid employment through the supported employment service (Stone, 2023). Results gathered from the study may include recommendations for improved support employment services offered to adults with I/DD.

Social Problem

The social problem is the dearth of supported employment services for adults with I/DD in Westchester County, New York (Office of the New York State Comptroller, 2024). In general, there is a shortage of supported employment assistance for adults with

I/DD (Butterworth et al., 2024). Adults with I/DD face a significant need for improved supported employment services (Heron & Bruk-Lee, 2023). Regardless of research, policy implementation and support over a course of 40 years, efforts to improve employment opportunities for people with I/DD have proved difficult (Butterworth et al., 2024). Butterworth et al. (2024) posited that improving employment for people with I/DD is essential. This prioritization reflects a broad consensus among key stakeholders, highlighting the collective recognition of the importance of improving employment outcomes for individuals with I/DD. (Butterworth et al., 2024). Their advocacy underscores the urgent need for systemic changes to address persistent barriers and expand meaningful employment opportunities (Butterworth et al., 2024). Individuals' reliance on support staff to access employment is an unavoidable hindrance to their independence. It is even more disadvantageous when the staff on which they rely are unavailable or lack support to function in their roles. Recent researchers' reports show staff turnover rates rising from 45% to almost 70% within an approximate four-year period (Diament, 2023). Additional data from authors show unachieved employment outcomes due to poor staff training, leading to inconsistent client support services being provided (Butterworth et al., 2024).

Although the disability community is the largest marginalized group in the United States, they are the least represented in the labor force (Phillips (2023). Riccio (2023) agrees that nationally, there is a low number of employment opportunities for people with I/DD (Riccio, 2023). Records indicate that 12% of working aged people in the United States have a disability (Riccio, 2023). Still, only 32 % of these people have sources of

employment (Ricchio, 2023). Access to quality supported employment staff and services would improve independence among people with I/DD and give a 40% boost in their potential to receive a competitive salary (Ricchio, 2023).

Local Problem

There are several identified existing barriers that impact the provision of adequate supported employment services in Westchester County, New York. Many employment agencies struggle to effectively support the employment outcomes for adults with I/DD due to factors like funding, limited support staff (Guzmán, 2021), lack of networking among each other (Christensen et al., 2017), as well as difficulties establishing partnerships with employers due to their misconceptions of the competencies of people with disabilities (Office of the New York State Comptroller, 2024).

Programs like ACCES-VR, which are promoted as a means of streamlining the supported employment process in Westchester County, New York, fail to adequately bridge the employment gap (Stone, 2023). Though they often initiate the enrollment process, their follow-through to help people with I/DD secure jobs is subpar (Stone, 2023). Alongside limited staffing, employment agencies neglect to maintain data and monitor program outcomes to ensure people with I/DD are meeting their employment goals (Stone, 2023). They fail to build adequate relationships with potential employers within the community (Stone, 2023). As such, people with disabilities continue to face inequities, despite their willingness and qualifications (Stone, 2023). Although the employment rate among people with disabilities has shown some improvement, there is still evidence of difficulties obtaining employment (Pfeffer, 2023).

My goal in conducting this study was to understand staff perceptions about barriers that impact the effectiveness of the supported employment services they provide to adults with I/DD whom they support in Westchester County, New York. The result is irregular community engagement opportunities for clients and support staff's failure to form strong connections with employers to secure jobs for individuals served (Butterworth et al., 2024). In the state of New York, there is a 31% staff turnover rate at agencies that support people with I/DD, and a plethora of vacancies, due to lack of state funding needed to offer sustainable salaries (Bernstein & Burroughs, 2024). Stone (2023) supports the idea of staff shortage by explaining there are only three hundred staff providing vocational services to the 50,000 service recipients statewide. In Westchester County, the City of White Plains has fourteen support staff providing services for 198 clients (Stone, 2023). To amplify the severity of the staffing crisis, about a third of the service staff across the state currently qualify for retirement (Stone, 2023). Further research shows a decline in supported employment services in the state due to agencies' failure to maximize use of the New York Employment Services System, a structured program in place to help support the employment of people with disabilities (Office of the New York State Comptroller, 2022). While these existing barriers continue, there are also committed human service workers and successful strategies and actions that are not being utilized. To drive change, I explored these in this study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of human services staff and administrators of a supported employment program in Westchester

County, New York, about what is currently working well and how to add strategies to improve the services provided to adults with I/DD. While current literature offers information about supported employment barriers, more research was needed to understand the experiences and perspectives of human service employees who work directly with service users and employers to promote competitive employment. Using a force field analysis approach allowed me to grasp factors that help or hinder program outcomes, thereby benefiting the development of a solution-based plan.

Research Question

The research question for the planned study was “What are human service staff and administrators’ perceptions of the services of the organization’s supported employment program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities?”

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that I used to shape this study is Kurt Lewin’s model of change, established as having organizational impact in 1951 (Lewin & Cartwright, 1951). Lewin’s model was used as a guide to explore accomplishment of change in group settings. Lewin believed that people’s behaviors and thoughts are products of their environment, and that they are more inclined to accept change has been identified as a priority by self-advocates, families, state disability agencies, and federal policy makers has been identified as a priority by self-advocates, families, state disability agencies, and federal policy makers if they are included in the plan (Lewin, 1946). Using a three-stage approach known as unfreezing, change and refreezing, Lewin outlined how organizations

can promote collective involvement to yield better outcomes and adherence to change within organizations (Lewin, 1947).

Lewin's change model describes how to evaluate and understand the need for organizational change, unfreeze employees by outlining the pros of the change, then refreeze changes to improve the services offered by the organization. I used the preliminary exploration of the professionals' perceptions of services in Westchester County, New York to inform if change was needed. Lewin's model provided a lens through which I viewed the perceptions of human services staff and administrators to determine changes needed within the organization. In the literature review, I further discuss how Lewin's model can generate greater acceptance of change implementation, which defined my approach to improving employment services provided to adults with I/DD.

Nature of the Study

To conduct this qualitative study, my approach was based on the work of Ashworth et al. (2023), using a force field analysis research design to gather and assess factors that influence change in supported employment services for people with disabilities. I chose this method because it supported the purpose of the study, to gain insight concerning employment services being provided by the program in Westchester County, New York, and helped to determine the need for change or enhancements to the outcome of these services offered to adults with I/DD.

For my planned research design, I needed narrative written responses as data. Hence, I recruited both human services staff and administrators, who provide supported

employment services to adults with I/DD at the organization in Westchester County, New York, as participants in this study. I conducted two rounds of sequential surveys using Survey Monkey. The first survey collected all the ideas from participants in responding to open-ended questions regarding their thoughts about how the supportive employment program improves services for adults with I/DD. The second round focused on asking the participants to rank a presented list of collected and analyzed ideas gathered from their responses in the first round of surveys. To analyze data, survey responses were reviewed to find common ideas and patterns among participants. Factors that drove or hindered change were analyzed to determine action taken within the supported employment program.

Defined Terms

In this section, particular terms related to the human services problem are defined, to clarify their context in the research.

Intellectual/ Developmental Disabilities (I/DD): A combination of lifelong cognitive and functional debilities, driven by genetics, illness, birth defects, or injury, which impact a person from the early stages of development through life (University of Rochester Medical Center, 2024). Intellectual disabilities affect aspects of critical thinking and interactions, while developmental impacts areas of mobility and language; both categories of disability alter learning and the ability to live independently (University of Rochester Medical Center, 2024).

Significance of the Study

Significance of the Study for Organization

This study is significant in that it may fill a gap in understanding by focusing on human service staff and administrators' perceptions of the services of the organization's supported employment program for adults with I/DD. The results of this force field analysis may aid the organization to implement changes, as necessary, to improve the success of the supported employment program. Employment among the intellectual and developmental disabilities population has been a force for positive social change by addressing societal inequalities. Because many adults with I/DD seek employment independence, understanding clients' needs and the organization's supported employment offerings may allow increased job training skills that will drive involvement in and collaborations with employers in the job market

Significance of the Study for Human Services

This study is significant to the field of human services, as it may contribute to the current body of literature that helps to shape the delivery of supported employment services for people with I/DD on a global scale. Employment breeds autonomy and a sense of belonging among people with I/DD. Results of the study may provide awareness and enable human services researchers to absorb the function of a force field analysis in gaining insight when evaluating service delivery programs. Understanding staff perceptions of deficiencies in the delivery of human services may lead to the effective implementation of a successful action plan, thereby affecting positive social change. In

the next section, I review the recent literature on the topic of challenges for individuals with I/DD seeking employment.

Literature Review

To answer the research question, I addressed major themes. These themes included concepts of adults with I/DD; employment, supported employment services / support staff, structural barriers to employment of adults with I/DD. I also explored social barriers to employment for adults with I/DD, and interventions / improvement strategies for employment support and accessibility.

Literature Search Strategy

I conducted extensive research on literature related to the problem I am investigating, and reviewed publications from 2020 to 2025, with minimal review of work published in earlier years. The keywords I used to narrow the searched included *supported employment, supported employment outcomes, supported employment and I/DD, supported employment for adults with developmental disabilities, supported employment problems, employment supports, disability employment, vocational training for persons with i/dd, gaps in supported employment services, I/DD supported employment hindrances, developmental disability employment models* in the databases *OASIS Walden Library, EBSCO, Sage Journals, Google and Google Scholar*. Much of the literature addressed the employment needs of adults with disabilities. Further research led me to identify themes common to various publications.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is Kurt Lewin's change model (1951). Lewin believed that an organization's decision to create change is influenced by the group's bearing on a person's eagerness to change (Lewin, 1947). Research revealed better outcomes and adherence to change when there is collective involvement in the process (Lewin, 1947). Moreover, a person is more inclined to accept an organization's changes along with the group than be perceived as an outsider for standing against the change process (Lewin, 1947). Organizations that engage employees when considering changes are likely to yield greater results, as the group feels connected to the decisions being made (Lewin & Gold, 1999). In turn, adjustment to change becomes easier and concerns of regression to previous habits are unlikely (Lewin & Gold, 1999).

Lewin proposed organizations should work to maintain balance between restrictive forces that have no valuable effect and positive forces that lead to change (Wojciechowski et al., 2016). To achieve this successful change, Lewin (1947) suggested incorporating "three aspects: unfreezing (if necessary) the present level L1, moving to the new level L2, and freezing group life on the new level" (p. 35). The unfreezing stage describes the process of informing employees of the need for change (Wojciechowski et al., 2016). To ensure clarity and avoid misunderstandings, organizations must explain existing problems driving the decision to change. Secondly, the change stage can be considered the implementation or action stage. New policies and updated procedures are introduced at this level and communicated to employees through preferred methods to express the benefits to the organization (Wojciechowski et al., 2016). Thirdly, the

refreezing stage discusses steps organizations take to maintain the newly enforced changes and avoid regression to the previous culture (Wojciechowski et al., 2016). Lewin (1947) explained that because any given state is shaped by a set of driving and restraining forces, lasting change means that the new balance of forces must be stabilized so it resists further alteration. Thus, changes must be implemented strategically to introduce organizational growth and development. Lewin's model guides organizations to initiate this change by educating employees on the changes needed, highlighting the benefits of the proposed changes and removing negative forces, and implementing the changes to create a new balance Wojciechowski et al. (2016).

In his book *Planned Change*, Crosby (2020) posited that Lewin's change model is the best approach to planning organizational or group change. John-Joseph (2022) agreed with this notion, by outlining how Lewin's theory was used among organizational leaders to develop strategies for advancing change to improve employee performance and overall business outcomes. Burnes (2020) added that Lewin's model significantly impacts structural change, as organizations note beneficial outcomes when they take steps to unfreeze procedures in place as needed, implement changes, then refreeze those changes to ensure the workforce abides by the newly introduced standards. Lewin's change model theory aligns with the purpose of the study by focusing on decision making about changes needed to enhance employment outcomes for adults with I/DD receiving supported employment services in Westchester County, New York. The model provides a basis for the assessment of factors that promote or limit current practices and job placement strategies.

Lewin's change model was also used to examine improvements needed to create better connections between organizational leadership and their workforce, leading to employee gratification and overall improved outcomes (Gilliland, 2023). To further explain the impact of Lewin's change theory on organizational success, I identified his theory of topological psychology as support for structural change. Rooted in mathematics and physics, Lewin's topology describes a psychological concept that connects theoretical organizational approaches to change with practical life occurrences (Endrejat & Burnes, 2022). To help employees understand the anticipated outcomes better, topological psychology outlines the use of practical approaches to provide a complete view of change feasibility (Endrejat & Burnes, 2022). For example, an organization may want to introduce remote timeclocks to reduce employee lateness. Employees are better able to connect with the idea if it is outlined on paper, accompanied by pros and cons. Topological psychology measures include the use of visual aids for concrete support, speaking in simpler terms so everyone understands the ideas being explained, and considering other opinions, as they may lead to new concepts for achieving change (Endrejat & Burnes, 2022). Lewin's topological psychology and change theories are connected, as they both utilize unfreezing to create organizational changes.

Regarding the employment of people with disabilities, Lewin's model of change is shown to help organization leaders drive changes that lead to improved relationships between supported employment agencies and employers. Wescott et al., (2023) explored Lewin's model, and its potential to effectively influence policy change within organizations, to prevent any bias associated with disability rights. Rizky (2022)

supported this idea by showing how Lewin influenced the need for organizational change, leading to the employment of people with disabilities. Such a structural change is shown to cultivate a more improved work environment and create an inclusive organizational culture that allows for better management of employees with disabilities (Rizky, 2022).

The logical connections between the framework presented and the gap in practice of this study include utilizing Lewin's model of change to frame the force field analysis to discover the program's setbacks and progressions. Using a force field analysis, I anticipate responses from support staff that will outline push and pull factors affecting employment outcomes among individuals with I/DD at the organization providing supported employment services to adults with I/DD in Westchester County, New York. The purpose of this study is to analyze the program's current supported employment services, to understand what is missing, and determine changes needed for improved employment opportunities, thus advancing program outcomes for adults with I/DD.

Themes and Subthemes of Literature Related to Human Services Problem

Adults with I/DD

The term I/DD references a combination of intellectual and developmental disabilities and is used to describe a range of debilities that contribute to mobility, learning, communication and self-care difficulties (University of Rochester Medical Center, 2024). Reports from McBride et al (2021) showed that approximately 2% of Americans have an I/DD diagnosis, with 2.28 million, or 44% percent of those people being adults. In the United States, to be classified as an individual with I/DD, a person

must be diagnosed during childhood, before age 18, and show significant deficiencies in his or her physical functioning and levels of intelligence (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2021).

History of I/DD. Historically, people with I/DD were not considered important (Conrad, 2020). In fact, the United States duplicated their mistreatment of persons with I/DD from England, where they were classified as idiots and lunatics (Conrad, 2020). Trent (2021) highlighted the use of degrading titles such as stupid, flawed, retarded, and foolish to describe those impacted by I/DD. Such people were likened to animals, considered unfit to make sensible decisions and thought to be pitied (Conrad, 2020). Shared imperfections caused people with I/DD to be viewed as a marginalized, minority group (Trent, 2021). Both Conrad and Trent's research reported a similar account of movements and advancements, showing progressive philosophies and treatment of people with I/DD over time. Still, Conrad (2020) shared a more detailed timeline depicting an evolution from the institutionalization and sterilization of people with I/DD through the closure of inhumane facilities, the beginning of educational opportunities, and introduction to living in communities (Conrad, 2020).

Community-based living began around 1970, and led to greater integration, as the doors of cruel, inhumane institutions were being permanently closed (Trent, 2021). Around this time, people with I/DD lived in what were considered normal homes, mingled with non-disabled persons, and gained access to similar benefits (Conrad, 2020). It was a step in a socially positive direction that created better access to healthcare, housing, and employment, among other services (Conrad, 2020).

While there have been immense positive changes to laws that govern the treatment of people with I/DD, Conrad (2020) provides a narrative that guides the flawed views currently expressed culturally and socially. One such point entails a lack of equal concern within the disability community. Though the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 serves to prevent discrimination and accommodate fairness for people with disabilities, it failed to equally define considerations for people with I/DD, much like it does for those challenged by a physical impairment (Conrad 2020). The employment of adults with I/DD highlights another example of current social flaws. Trent (2021) found that people with I/DD often lack gainful engagement, as there are no readily accessible sources of employment outside of workshops. The assignment of insignificant tasks or workshops for people with I/DD are compensated with subminimum wages (Conrad, 2020). Still, the evolution of I/DD continues. As social, political and cognitive awareness increases, society should continue to normalize the involvement of all people in the workforce and communities. Instead of focusing on accommodating and treating people with I/DD fairly, the laws of society should be geared toward a culture where there are equal opportunities for everyone (Conrad, 2020).

Classification of Intellectual / Developmental Disabilities. Approximately 15% of the world's population functions daily with a general disability (Wescott, 2023). Nagtegaal et al. (2023) reported the same percentage, sharing people with disabilities were less likely to be employed than people without a disability diagnosis. A disability is an impairment that can impact a person's physical and psychological body function. (Indiana University, 2024). To provide a clearer understanding, disability is classified by

an impaired ability to see, hear, move, understand or maintain health (Indiana University, 2024). Thought-processing disabilities are deemed intellectual, that manifest as limited understanding and inadequate social expression (Schalock et al., 2021). Developmental disability is outlined as a permanent incapacity resulting from a physical or mental deficit that inhibits general life functions (Schalock et al, 2021). Recent studies showed that more than 8 million people in America have been diagnosed with either intellectual or a developmental disability (University of Rochester Medical Center, 2024). Data from 2020 similarly revealed 8.3 million United States residents identified as either intellectually or developmentally disabled. Still, while state-run agencies were aware of 44% of the population's adults with I/DD, the remaining 56% were not listed as receiving state services (RISP Infographics, 2020). Though both categories of disability are independent of each other and have varying attributes, the diagnosis is often combined because of the coexisting psychological, physical, and social effects that hinder progress in both instances (Catabwa Valley Healthcare, 2024). Without an understanding of each diagnosis, it is easy to assume that everyone with a developmental disability is also intellectually impaired. Recognizing who is included in the I/DD category can be unclear, according to Tassé et al. (2024), in an article that discusses inconsistencies in information concerning characterization of people with I/DD. The interchangeable use of initials like ID, I/DD and ID/DD to reference debilities was noted as a contributor to this confusion (Tasse et al., 2024). Tasse et al. strongly suggested the inconsistencies that have occurred when providing reports are a direct result of this blur. Clinicians and researchers, including federal agencies in the United States reported a 3% to 17% variation in the

frequency of developmental disability diagnosis (Tassé et al., 2024). To avoid reporting discrepancies and increase clarity for readers and future researchers, Tassé et al. recommended that researchers and publishers include explicit definitions of both categories of disabilities, as well as the initials being used when discussing.

Stigma Faced by People with I/DD. Adults with I/DD are a marginalized group, because of the stigma associated with their disabilities. There appears to be a gap between the concept of I/DD and the stigma used to define it, according to McClean (2023). McClean (2023), who discussed disparities faced by adults with developmental disabilities, highlighted how adults with I/DD faced barriers concerning education, health, community services, and employment. McClean's review presents the Medical model, Social model and Critical disability theory as reasons for stigmatization of persons with disabilities. Per the Medical model, disability is an internal defect that must be therapeutically corrected or circumvented, while the Social model refers to it as a product of societal barriers and a lack of adequate provisions for those impacted (McClean 2023). However, the Critical disability theory was suggested as a combination of both ideas to highlight how disability stigmatization can decrease through more generalized opportunities for health, education, employment, and other prospects, regardless of debility (McClean, 2023). While the article highlighted the differences in disparities faced between people with and without disabilities, more information is needed to foster a better understanding of employment inequities faced by people with disabilities, because of stigma.

In a study conducted among 395 adults where 1.3% disclosed having I/DD, stigmatization was linked to minimal knowledge of I/DD disabilities, paired with an increased desire to avoid interactions with people having that disability (Jansen-van Vuuren & Aldersey, 2020). Both researchers faulted society's insensitivity for this low declaration of disability identity (Jansen-van Vuuren & Aldersey, 2020). They highlighted the need for fostering social acceptance of intellectual and developmental disabilities to prevent impacted persons and their families from absorbing the negative effects of societal bias, thus avoiding disclosure. The list of identified interventions included creating more inclusive opportunities to foster the engagement of people with I/DD (Jansen-van Vuuren & Aldersey, 2020). Additional suggestions for improving social tolerance involved offering sensitivity training for people unfamiliar with the culture of disability, so they may interact without ignorance (Jansen-van Vuuren & Aldersey, 2020). A strength of the study was that it addressed suggestions for increased acceptance of and decreased social stigma among people with I/DD (Jansen-van Vuuren & Aldersey, 2020). However, it did not highlight plans to address bias and clichéd perceptions of people with I/DD within the workforce. As a result of increased stigma, the employment rate remained minimal among adults with I/DD, regardless of the benefits of hiring them (Heron et al, 2020). It is worth considering the value of employment for people with I/DD.

Employment of People with I/DD

Employment is important to people with I/DD. It allows them to feel a sense of accomplishment and belonging. In a study where 18 people with I/DD were interviewed

to gain their perspectives about working, Gilson et al. (2022) explained several advantages of employment. Being able to work allowed people with I/DD to remain occupied, earn money, mingle with other non-disabled people, increase their self-esteem, and live fulfilled, independent lives (Gilson et al., 2022). Similarly, Jacob (2022) listed increased autonomy, gained experience, improved socialization and self-satisfaction as benefits of working for people with I/DD.

Despite the advantages of employment, people with I/DD were not always given employment opportunities. According to Gilson et al, people with I/DD were typically unemployed or underemployed with vague job titles and little pay. They were isolated as a group, with jobs in sheltered workshops that were specifically designed for people with disabilities and paid subminimum income (Gilson et al., 2022). Heron & Bruk-Lee (2023) agreed that historically there were less chances for people with I/DD to be a part of the labor force than their peers without disabilities. Due to their limited cognition, the impacted population faced significant limitations, as they were not considered capable of securing and maintaining jobs (Heron & Bruk-Lee, 2023). They were thought of as helpless people who lacked skill and independence (Heron & Bruk-Lee, 2023).

To promote inclusiveness and fair compensation for people with I/DD, the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy developed policies like Employment First (Gilson et al., 2022). Despite the objective of the initiative, the number of gainfully employed people with I/DD remains crucially low (Gilson et al., 2022). The study did not generate research data to pinpoint underlying reasons.

To better understand some of the obstacles faced by adults with I/DD, it is important to gain insight into the perceptions and expectations employers have of them. While there was a recorded 12% of working aged people in the United States with a disability, only 32 % were shown to have sources of employment (Ricchio, 2023). As such, there are approximately 17.9 million adults in the United States with disabilities, who depend on a program for monetary support, instead of working (Ricchio, 2023). Thus, an I/DD diagnosis often opens a portal to employment barriers.

Social Barriers. The employment rate continues to be low because of social barriers. A study conducted among 65 participants offered employer behavior as a key determinant of employment. It pointed out that a company's views and beliefs influenced a person's ability to secure and maintain employment (Jacob et al., 2023). Companies that had a poor attitude toward employees with I/DD were usually discriminatory and offered a sub-minimum rate to those they hired (Jacob et al., 2023). Such a culture led to isolation and feelings of inferiority among people with I/DD, which triggered a decline in onboarding and staff retention (Jacob et al., 2023). The study featured overall social barriers to the employment of people with I/DD, like mediocre treatment from managers, negative work cultures, bias, and failure to understand or accommodate their needs (Jacob et al., 2023). It did not address solutions for confronting the identified social barriers to employment.

Concerns about employment barriers are also echoed by families of people with I/DD. In a study where 60 parents and siblings of persons with I/DD were interviewed, families expressed unease in relation to their loved ones' communication difficulties,

inability to independently search for jobs, lack of adequate education, and minimal access to resources (Carter et al., 2020). Parents' worries were fueled by the thought that their children with autism may miss important social communication cues at work (Carter et al., 2020). They were deeply concerned with minimizing employment barriers by finding the right job setting that would allow their adult children with autism to thrive (Carter et al., 2020).

More specifically, in an article discussing employment barriers, Pfeffer (2023) added that in the state of New York, a mere 33% of the 1,000,000 working-aged adults with disabilities have jobs. To show results on a more intimate scale, Park & Park (2019) highlighted those people with a disability diagnosis had a 3-4 times lesser chance of being hired than those without. The result is a noticeable gap between what individuals with I/DD are capable of and what employers assume they can do. This discrepancy is in part due to the negative attitudes of employers who are not knowledgeable about the abilities or potential of people with I/DD (Pfeffer, 2023). Absence of knowledge paired with inexperience has led to a dangerous notion of incompetence among the disability population. One writer discussing employer hiring drawbacks identified worry, unease, and other presumed misconceptions as reasons for the low to no hiring of people with I/DD (HireAbility Spokane, n.d.). Some employers believe people with I/DD lack skills and experience, cannot be trained, are likely to create a time-consuming onboarding process and may foster an uncomfortable work setting among other coworkers (HireAbility Spokane, n.d.). In their documented review of several studies about barriers to employment, Nagtegaal et al. (2023) agreed that many employers' unawareness of

different debilities was the reason behind their negative perceptions of employees with disabilities. Additionally, some employers perceived people with disabilities as inefficient and costly to hire (Nagtegaal, 2023). Naturally, employment barriers negatively affect job seekers, more so people who already deal with the daily demands of living with a disability. Nagtegaal discussed employer attitudes and highlighted that the only way to overcome the problem of the limited hiring of people with I/DD is to understand the importance of independence. Independence is vital for people with I/DD as much as it is for those without a diagnosis. As such, employers should prioritize people's abilities instead of solely focusing on their incapacities. They should align their organizations with policies that promote the rights and fair treatment of people with disabilities (Nagtegaal, 2023). Similarly, Heron et al (2020) revealed employers must be willing to hire people with I/DD as a means of eliminating employment barriers. He added that modifying policies to promote the hiring and accommodation of people with I/DD will boost their self-confidence and improve their overall health and wellness.

Sometimes barriers extend beyond obtaining jobs that align with the abilities of people with I/DD. Maintaining employment after being hired can be challenging but is equally important to achieving successful outcomes (Corbière et al., 2024). In an article concerning job tenure for people with mental illnesses, Corbière et al. (2024) discussed factors that determine people's ability to hold jobs and the importance of support staff in minimizing barriers to workplace tenure. Due to declined cognition, people with I/DD and other comorbidities can lack workforce discipline, which often result in employment lasting an average of six to eight months (Corbière et al., 2024). A few factors impact

this duration, including cognitive functioning, work history and employer accommodations (Corbière et al., 2024). Results from the study showed that people with higher cognitive functioning valued the benefits of a job, thus they were likely to remain employed for longer periods (Corbière et al., 2024). However, people with lower cognition were unable to tolerate more than 21 hours of work per week (Corbière et al., 2024). Researchers found that persons with prior work experience showed a higher possibility of lasting the longest in their roles (Corbière et al., 2024). Yet, many people with disabilities lack work experiences, making it the biggest barrier to gaining and maintaining competitive employment (Corbière et al., 2024). Concerns about people's inability to keep a job may cause some employers to eventually become less tolerant and refuse to offer inclusive employment to people with I/DD.

Though found to be less significant in predicting job tenure, flexibility also helps people remain in their roles for a longer time. When identifying jobs for people with I/DD, job coaches should discuss accommodations needed. Employers may be more lenient with their expectations of people with I/DD, allow room for error, and may offer altered schedules as well as employee support when necessary (Corbière et al., 2024). The role of support staff is to build relationships with their clients, so they can bridge the interactions with potential employers to implement strategies that will increase tenure (Corbière et al., 2024).

Supported Employment Services

Supported employment is an ideal where individuals with notable disabilities receive support and instruction to acquire and maintain reasonable paid employment in an

inclusive setting (Department of Workforce Development, 2019). The initiative also incorporates customized employment, a concept that tailors paid jobs to people with disabilities based on a match between their capabilities and employers' requirements (Department of Workforce Development, 2019). Funding for supported employment is provided by state monies, but there are also other streams of funding involved (Connect Center, 2024). To establish services, individuals interested in obtaining a job will meet with their support team, including case workers, supported employment service providers, and any involved family members (Connect Center, 2024). Assigned job coaches work to assess individuals' skills and interests, then develop a plan for vocational rehabilitation, job placement and training (Connect Center, 2024). While some people with I/DD eventually function independently in their work environment, many others require close support over a longer period (Connect Center, 2024). For people with more advanced needs, job coaches accompany them to their work locations to provide training, as well as help employers navigate social barriers and behavioral difficulties they present (Connect Center, 2024).

The supported employment approach increased in prevalence over the years. When compared to sheltered workshops that lacked inclusion and monetary compensation, supported employment has effectively provided paid job opportunities for many people with I/DD (Vigna et al., 2024). Training and guidance received from staff help service recipients enjoy the benefits of inclusive employment without fear of navigating the process on their own. Vigna et al., (2024) argued that offering tailored employment support for people with I/DD helped them feel included and accomplished.

Employers also benefit from hiring employees with I/DD, as they prove reliable, punctual, willing to learn, and tend to hold their positions long-term (Vigna et al., 2024). In an article discussing the state of employment among people diagnosed with I/DD, Butterworth et al. (2024) added that employment is a vital life goal that connects people to their communities, improves economic independence, and supports health and wellness. When people are gainfully employed, they stress less about the cost of food, shelter and other finances. Their mental wellness is improved because of frequent social interactions with other people (Anderson et al., 2020).

In a study discussing employment rewards that go beyond earnings, Carter et al. (2023) agreed that supported employment allowed people with I/DD to feel included and proud, much like their non-disabled counterparts. Still, joint support was needed from family members, community businesses and service providers, to build confidence and provide the motivation needed to achieve this goal (Carter et al., 2023). Carter et al. presented responses from 55 family members of employees with I/DD in Tennessee. They reported several advantages of having a strong support system to implement supported employment for people with I/DD (Carter et al., 2023). Family members felt that supported employment enhanced their loved one's individuality, self-reliance, sense of pride, and their ability to independently afford necessities like groceries and vehicle maintenance (Carter et al., 2023). Other people felt that successfully accessing meaningful jobs helped their family members with I/DD feel connected to their communities, because they were responsibly engaged in activities they enjoyed (Carter et al., 2023). While presenting an informative study, researchers provided a limited representation of

people with I/DD, since the entire sample came from one state. Responses solely evidenced the opinions of family members, without providing a report of the direct experiences of people receiving supported employment services. Additional limitations of the study included the researchers' failure to account for the experiences of people who were not successfully supported in their quest to obtain jobs.

Similarly, Chase (2021) theorized that the inclusion of caregivers in the supported employment process could enhance outcomes for people with I/DD. Since parents and guardians are familiar with their loved ones' capabilities, preferences and goals, they can help to advocate for improved employment outcomes (Chase, 2021). However, family input must be balanced, to avoid overwhelming the process. In her article discussing the concerns of roughly 400 employment specialists during a training session, Chase (2021) highlighted high expectations and excessive involvement of caregivers as a common barrier to the supported employment process for persons with I/DD. Caregivers who become overly involved in the supported employment process are likely to foster dependence and discourage autonomy among their loved ones (Chase, 2021). The extreme involvement of parents may conflict with efforts made by the supported employment agency to navigate progress, as they tend to impose their outlook on the process (Chase 2021).

Chase (2021) identified a connection between extreme family involvement and the successful achievement of outcomes among persons with I/DD in the supported employment process. She drew attention to the need for boundaries to maintain roles and balance the function of support staff in securing and maintaining suitable employment for

people with I/DD. Nevertheless, while Chase's article offered perspectives from employment support staff and caregivers concerning each other's involvement in the supported employment process, there was no information evidencing the viewpoints of those receiving the supported employment services.

Despite the benefits of salaried employment, there remains a low rate of employment among people with I/DD (Connect Center, 2024). Butterworth et al. (2024) agreed with the disconnect, suggesting supported employment efforts yielded little improvements for people with I/DD, despite research and policy adjustments over the last 40 years. A contributor to this slow progress is the multiple funding sources for supported employment services. Between the policies and procedures of federal and state sponsoring agencies, people with I/DD face numerous obstacles moving on from educational programs or attempting to obtain paid employment (Butterworth et al., 2024).

Structural Barriers. People with I/DD who desire to work are no strangers to the hindrances associated with supported employment. Though employment is the preferred outcome for people with I/DD (Butterworth et al.), some service recipients' goals fail to actualize (Stone, 2023). To support his argument concerning unsuccessful employment outcomes, Stone highlighted unsatisfactory practices at support agencies like Adult Career and Continuing Education Services–Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR) in New York state. Though operated by the State Education Department (SED) with a mission to help people with I/DD achieve their long-term career goals through education and rehabilitation services, the reality did not always align (Stone, 2023). Like many supported employment agencies, ACCES-VR failed to deliver autonomy through

employment, as promised for people like Maddie Diorio, a high school graduate with Cerebral Palsy, from Westchester County New York (Stone, 2023). Maddie's experience with being hopeful for a job that never actualized through ACCES-VR emphasized the state program's failure to implement efficient supported employment services (Stone, 2023). It evidenced a pattern of disregard for financial independence and self-actualization outcomes when a promise of job placement and support was replaced by lack of follow up and no communication (Stone, 2023).

Unfortunately, lack of follow-up is a result of several issues across New York state. In addition to a shortage of adequate funding, Stone (2023) highlighted a burn out concern impacting support staff. Burn out is caused by a combination of minimal staffing, limited resources, and the expectation that the full workload is being completed (Bernstein & Burroughs, 2024). To accomplish tasks, support staff consistently work multiple shifts and handle excessive case assignments, leading to exhaustion and reduced efficiency (Bernstein & Burroughs, 2024). Still, staff are not encouraged to continue in their roles. They are undercompensated for their jobs, and incentives seem uncommon (Bernstein & Burroughs, 2024). As an integral part of the plan to promote enhanced independence and help people with I/DD achieve their goals, staff should be paid in accordance with their workload. However, the reality is far from the expectation in the state of New York. In fact, Bernstein & Burroughs (2024) highlighted Governor Hochul's decision to limit funding for support staff in New York state. The 2024-25 fiscal budget outlined a pay cut for support staff, as requests for a 3.2% cost of living adjustment yielded only a 2.8% raise (Bernstein & Burroughs, 2024). A pay cut meant staff retention

would decrease, and potential hires would seek employment elsewhere, directly creating an atmosphere for burnout (Bernstein & Burroughs, 2024). The state's 2024-25 budget report evidenced a 31% staff turnover rate with about 20,000 unfilled support staff positions (Bernstein & Burroughs, 2024). In New York, 50,000 service recipients were supported by 300 support staff, 100 of whom qualify for retirement (Stone, 2023). In the Westchester County area, support staff were assigned an average of 198 people per caseload, with some serving more than 300 clients (Stone, 2023). Often, the results of these obstacles are misplaced documentation, misaligned job placements, inadequate levels of support, low to no communication, and neglect for the service recipients involved (Stone, 2023).

In addition to already existing supported employment discrepancies, the COVID-19 pandemic increased the disadvantage. The health epidemic contributed to elevated levels of unemployment among people with disabilities in New York state, which proved a lengthier resurgence than other states in America (Office of Budget Policy and Analysis, 2023). With a steady increase in unemployment levels among disabled New Yorkers, statistics showed a 4.7% national difference in 2022 (Office of Budget Policy and Analysis, 2023). To address the employment recovery issue, New York state broadened the standards of their services contracting program, and improved endorsement programs for employers who took the EmployAbility pledge to promote workplace inclusion (Office of Budget Policy and Analysis, 2023). Other resolutions included providing reasonable workplace accommodations as outlined in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and a plan to add 500 new civil service positions for with

disabilities (Office of Budget Policy and Analysis, 2023). As such, the report highlighted the need for ongoing strategic planning and implementation of solution-based policies and procedures to increase the employment rate for people with disabilities in New York (Office of Budget Policy and Analysis, 2023).

Conversely, New York State Comptroller, Thomas P. DiNapoli, blamed the state's Office of Mental Health (OMH) for failure to ensure agencies involved in the New York Employment Service System made use of the assigned centralized employment system (Office of the New York State Comptroller, 2022). Audit results revealed that the system, designed to boost employment for people with disabilities in New York, was being poorly supervised and underutilized (Office of the New York State Comptroller, 2022). Plans made in 2015, by New York's Employment First Commission, instituted objectives to improve employment and reduce poverty by 5% each for people with disabilities (Office of the New York State Comptroller, 2022). However, the system failed to produce anticipated outcomes, since assessments done between 2013 and 2020 showed employment grew less than 1% for people with disabilities, while poverty reduced by only 3% (Office of the New York State Comptroller, 2020). Research conducted by the Office of the New York State Comptroller proved that the system in place was only being used by one of the seven state agencies responsible for hiring employment service providers (Office of the New York State Comptroller, 2022). Of the 621 providers, only 199 actively used the system (Office of the New York State Comptroller, 2022). OMH's failure to implement policies that enforced and monitored the use of the allotted employment support system resulted in loss of monies that would

typically be acquired by employment agencies through service provision (Office of the New York State Comptroller, 2022). The lack of oversight also negatively impacts people with I/DD as they are prone to unmet employment goals which lead to reduced autonomy and prolonged dependence on state benefits (Office of the New York State Comptroller, 2022). While no mention was made of the impact on support staff, the Office of the New York State Comptroller offered ideas to improve the underutilization of the employment support system. To improve the supported employment initiative in New York, DiNapoli suggested OMH take accountability for their shortcomings and put policies in place to monitor the flaws revealed (Office of the New York State Comptroller, 2022).

Support Staff Perspective. Support staff, also called job coaches or job developers, are a knowledgeable resource when seeking to understand the barriers and successes of the supported employment process. As a direct link between employers and people with I/DD who desire to work, job coaches have first-hand experience working to connect clients from a vulnerable population to competitive jobs that will boost their autonomy (Kim, 2024). Support staff facilitate career guidance for people with I/DD, which enables such persons to recognize and address their strengths and limitations, thus achieving their employment goals (Kim, 2024). Thus, it is important to understand perceptions of support staff about what is lacking or desired to help them perform their jobs more effectively.

In a study aimed at identifying the perspectives of 11 job coaches concerning obstacles faced when supporting people with I/DD, Kim recognized support staff were impacted by several connecting factors. Her study evidenced a correlation between lack

of autism awareness and supported employment opportunities. Responses from participants highlighted the impact of disability traits on the functionality of people with autism in the workforce (Kim, 2024). Behaviors, limited attention span, minimal awareness and inconsistency are characteristics that may be present, depending on the severity of a person's diagnosis (Kim, 2024). Still support staff must be equipped to help them find jobs where they can thrive despite their challenges (Kim, 2024). To pilot employment preparedness, job coaches can benefit from reliance on a support system; to include clients' family members and the supported employment agencies they represent (Kim, 2024). This, however, is not always the case. Outside of family involvement, many job coaches rely on each other to navigate their job functions and handle the challenges of finding employment that aligns with their clients' skills and interests (Kim, 2024). Based on perceptions, there is minimal managerial support and a lack of adequate resources to provide ongoing staff training (Kim, 2024). Deprivation of access to ongoing training and supportive resources creates an atmosphere of inconsistency for support staff (Kim, 2024). Training will increase awareness among support staff, leading to increased client support and accommodation at job sites (Kim, 2024). Concerning job sites, Kim reported a perceived lack of disability awareness among employers and coworkers (Kim, 2024). Working with people with I/DD is foreign to some business owners and their staff. Since they lack familiarity, employers and their staff base their feelings about working alongside people with I/DD on their ignorance (Kim, 2024). Their inability to understand the needs of people with I/DD can lead to miscommunication, as well as misunderstood routines and social habits (Kim, 2024).

Dreaver et al. (2020) supported the concept of employers and coworkers being knowledgeable about I/DD. Working alongside employers and coworkers who are familiar with disabilities improves confidence and emits feelings of inclusivity among people with I/DD (Dreaver et al., 2020). Employers who invest in disability sensitivity training and other workshops for themselves and their personnel gain a deeper understanding of how I/DD affects people's behaviors and job function (Dreaver et al., 2020). Knowledge enhances the relationship between employers and job coaches by improving job matching, while tailoring their support and expectations for task completion (Dreaver et al., 2020).

Overall, employment coaches and potential employers need to be adequately equipped with ongoing training and resources necessary for supporting the needs of clients with I/DD (Kim, 2024). Kim's research data drove the idea of updating program policies to include a disability awareness segment when conducting new employee training and orientation. While there was no indication of client perceptions, Kim proposed developments that provide exposure for inexperienced employees and enable the development of a problem-solving approach for cultivating relationships with business owners.

Relatedly, Di Francesco et al. (2021) agreed that training was necessary for staff and employers to support a smooth employment transition for people with I/DD. Training, paired with modified support proved helpful in establishing working relationships and identifying jobs that matched the needs of clients with the requirements of employers (Di Francesco et al., 2021). In their study, Di Francesco et al. (2021)

highlighted the importance of job coaches as a liaison between employees with I/DD and employers. The data shows their significance to the success of their clients' supported employment outcomes (Di Francesco et al., 2021). Not only do support staff facilitate job searches and matching; they also promote job preservation (DiFrancesco et al., 2021). When asked about their perceptions of employment and retention, support staff found it was more beneficial to pursue employment opportunities from employers who previously hired people with I/DD (Di Francesco et al., 2021). Employers and service recipients also note the value in having job coaches, since they steer the supported employment process competently by implementing strategic measures to train and properly match people with I/DD according to their skills and the needs of the employer (Di Francesco et al., 2021). Inexperienced employers have limited knowledge of I/DD characteristics, making it more challenging to recognize the talents of people with I/DD, as well as effectively communicate job expectations (Di Francesco et al., 2021). Without support staff, they could not effectively employ and retain people with I/DD (DiFrancesco et al., 2021).

Though researchers discussed employers' reliance on job coaches to promote training, support, and job retention among employees with I/DD, the data represents a limited geographical area. Studies covering a larger sample size from various supported employment programs would allow for a comparison of perspectives and more generalized results.

Interventions/Improvement Strategies for Employment Support and Accessibility

Despite the social and structural barriers, the goal of supported employment continues to empower independence among adults I/DD by helping them access paid

jobs. However, while competitive employment improves a person's financial independence, self-esteem and overall wellness (Weld-Blundell et al., 2021), the rate of employment among people with I/DD remains considerably low (DiFrancesco et al., 2021). To increase clients' abilities to meet their outcomes, employment agencies must work intentionally to address structural flaws that prevent current progress.

Weld-Blundell et al. (2021), in their article, discussed employment interventions to enhance workforce involvement for people with I/DD. Strategies included customized skills training and job site identification, by way of Individual Placement and Supports (IPS) or Supported Employment (SE) programs (Weld-Blundell et al., 2021). However, when looking to improve workforce readiness among people with I/DD, employment agencies should consider introducing a workforce preparation training course to develop clients' vocational skills (Weld-Blundell et al., 2021). Training ideas include mock job interviews, volunteer or stipend-based work experience opportunities, and job coaching with a fade plan in place to promote independence. These interventions would address limited vocational skills, lack of work experience and other barriers that prevent people with I/DD from securing and maintaining employment. Weld-Blundell et al. sparked the idea of an initiative that may actively engage job coaches in monthly or quarterly worksite check-ins, as necessary, to ensure reasonable working conditions and fair treatment of their clients. Still, the employment process is not a generalized approach, and while I/DD covers a range of disabilities, people's levels of functionality differ (Weld-Blundell et al., 2021). More data is needed to outline effective plans that are

tailored to address employment outcomes for people with I/DD, according to their skills and levels of functioning.

Concerning efforts to provide training to support staff, Redmund et al. (2022) agreed that the implementation of a training curriculum will help to improve service provision for people with I/DD enrolled in a supported employment program. Researchers worked to understand the factors contributing to poorly supported employment outcomes (Redmund et al., 2022). Results evidenced a correlation between employee training structures and employment success, suggesting training should be specific to the role of the support staff and the level of service being provided (Redmund et al., 2022). While their roles overlap and titles are often substituted, job coaches and employment specialists serve different core functions (Redmund et al., 2022). Employment specialists generally handle customized employment services whereas job coaches are involved in long term supported employment efforts (Redmund et al., 2022). Research showed employment specialists required 40 to 80 hours of training while job coaches needed only eight (Redmund et al., 2022). Therefore, training tailored to job coaches was expected to eliminate unrelated material and focus on promoting job development strategies necessary for improved supported employment outcomes (Redmund et al., 2022). Although it was an informative study, Redmund et al. did not clarify whether the tiered training approach yielded better results than a generalized training course would have for employment support staff.

With a need to tackle burn out and staffing shortages, supported employment agencies may benefit from incorporating people with I/DD in their plans to improve job

placement strategies. Programs can promote positive employment outcomes by training clients to help navigate the job search process. Training would result in increased independence and allow for minimal reliance on support staff (Chaparro et al., 2022). In a pilot study involving several participants, Chaparro et al., (2022) sought to address a gap in the availability of accessible employment platforms for people with I/DD. With the prevalence of social media, it was unclear how well people with I/DD navigated the Internet, and with how much independence (Chaparro et al., 2022). Hence, the launch of CONTACTO, a digital networking platform aimed at fostering online social inclusion for people with I/DD. Through this initiative, researchers discovered a connection between the use of computer-based assistive technology and supported employment (Chaparro et al., 2022). The site mimics career-based platforms like LinkedIn and is designed to allow job searchers with I/DD to independently navigate applications and connect with recruiters (Chaparro et al., 2022). The study revealed CONTACTO was beneficial, as users experienced minimal anxiety and increased control of networking (Chaparro et al., 2022). The absence of face-to-face encounters allowed job seekers with I/DD to reach out to employers without fear and respond to messages at their convenience (Chaparro et al., 2022). Since the site is geared toward people with I/DD, communication, literacy, and accessibility accommodations are implemented (Chaparro et al., 2022). Grammatical errors, imperfect tense, and other forms of improper sentence structure are overlooked and accepted without fault (Chaparro et al., 2022).

Through the launch of CONTACTO, researchers emphasized the advantages of tailored, self-managed, accessible social networking services in job search for people

with I/DD (Chaparro, 2022). In addition to resume-building and other pre-employment skills, job coaches would be able to focus on helping clients create profiles, teaching them appropriate job application strategies, offering tips for networking with recruiters in an online forum, and prompting responses to potential employers (Chaparro et al., 2022). Support staff could accommodate larger caseloads without becoming severely overwhelmed or burnt out. Chaparro et al. evidenced how use of a platform like CONTACTO to promote self-management of the job search process would enable supported employment agencies to improve employment outcomes for people with I/DD. Still, there was no clear indication of the level of involvement needed by job coaches to support hiring and post-hiring of clients once they successfully connect with employers. Additionally, researchers did not address people with I/DD who lack digital literacy or those unable to access internet-enabled devices outside of their supported employment program setting. Inability to connect virtually could slow the networking process for people with I/DD.

Sometimes, improvement strategies are best acquired through conversation with a diverse group of people with differing thoughts and experiences. Research often focuses on analyzing the responses of a targeted group of people in a formal setting. However, facilitating conversation among varied people who would not otherwise meet to discuss their ideas, enables them to connect their thoughts, trade perspectives and learn about new resources (Sinclair et al., 2021) in a more casual setting. In an article detailing a community conversation event, 36 community members gathered to discuss their opinions of and ideas for increasing employment among people with I/DD (Sinclair et al.,

2021). Conversationalists included employers, educators, people with I/DD and caregivers who discussed stigma, segregation and other barriers to the employment of people with I/DD. It was discovered that there is a disconnect between employer perceptions and that of employees with I/DD (Sinclair et al., 2021).

Summary

To summarize, in section one I offered a background to the problem being studied. I introduced the research question, defined key terms and addressed the nature of the study. Kurt Lewin's model of change was identified as the theoretical framework to guide the study's approach to anticipated change. A review of published literature allowed me to discuss themes and sub-themes concerning the gap in supported employment services among people with I/DD. Supported employment is important to people with I/DD. It is a contributor of independence and improved self-esteem (Riccio, 2023). However, employment opportunities tend to be minimally available for this population noted as the largest marginalized group in the United States (Philips, 2020). Within the population of working-aged people with disabilities, only 32% have jobs (Riccio, 2023). Hence, there is a recognized need for enhanced supported employment services for adults with I/DD. Despite social and structural barriers that have historically contributed to this gap, access to quality supported employment services can improve employment outcomes for people with I/DD and significantly increase the possibility of them receiving a competitive salary (Riccio, 2023).

Specifically, within Westchester County, NY, adults with I/DD have a recognized need for improved supported employment services. Research highlighted staff burn-out,

training concerns, and an overall need for educating employers about the needs of employees with I/DD. It was evident that support staff are a necessary staple in the process, as they bridge the gap between potential employees with I/DD and the varied barriers they face. Having such a critical role deems support staff beneficial to this study, as their perceptions and perspectives will drive intervention strategies to achieve improved supported employment outcomes among adults with I/DD.

In section two, I will discuss the project, its purpose and design. I will introduce my role as the researcher, and outline the methodology, logic model and data collection strategies to be implemented. Within the section, I will detail my plan to effectively collect and analyze data. I will discuss the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process and approvals, as well as address ethical considerations, including participant refusals, any conflicts of interest, and secure data storage to protect the identity of the human subjects involved.

Section 2: The Project

Introduction

In Section 2, I discuss the purpose of the study, its project design, research methods, protocol, and my role as the researcher. I have included a preliminary logic model to support my formative evaluation of the program's needs and discuss ethical considerations for an objective research project. Using a force field analysis, I conducted a qualitative study to explore the human service staff and administrators' perceptions of what is currently working well and how to add strategies to improve the services of the organization's supported employment program for adults with I/DD in Westchester County, New York. Kurt Lewin's model of change (1951) is implemented as a framework to support my research question. In this section, I also discuss data collection tools, which took the form of narrative written responses as data. Survey monkey was used to generate sequential survey questions to be given to human services staff and administrators who provide supported employment services to adults with I/DD. Overall, I use Section 2 to support the need for research outlined in Section 1, while outlining strategies to execute the study in Section 3.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the human service staff and administrators' perceptions of what is currently working well and how to add strategies to improve the services of the organization's supported employment program for adults with I/DD in Westchester County, New York.

Project Design

I conducted a program evaluation as qualitative research using a force field analysis. I used this design to gather data needed to understand the perceptions of human service staff and administrators about what is working well within the program and how to improve the services of the organization's supported employment services for adults with I/DD. The program evaluation will be included in Appendix A.

Methods

Role of the Researcher

My role as the researcher extends beyond collecting data, to understanding the approach necessary to address the research question (Anas et al., 2022). Following the directions of Fink (2000), I designed the research technique, closely scrutinized and analyzed the data from participants, checked to ensure findings were valid, then reported the results. I designed and used surveys as my research method. I developed strategic open-ended questions that allowed me to collect and analyze data, thereby interpreting findings and shaping the research. As the researcher, I explored the beliefs and perceptions of staff concerning the supported employment services provided to people with I/DD.

Since I assessed lived experiences, my role as the researcher exposed me to ethical concerns and challenges. A challenge was managing my own bias in interpreting feedback from the participants, which included their perceptions and opinions of the program's operations. I kept a journal and monitored my own responses to the participants' answers. The data received was carefully analyzed.

To offer transparency and observe ethical considerations, following Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB), consent was obtained and outlined anonymity, data collection medium, frequency of data collection method, and participants' ability to opt out, should they make that decision. I analyzed data using a force field analysis approach (Toves et al., 2016). Data gathered from the Survey Monkey platform were assessed for factors driving decisions about change. Access to responses was limited to the researcher, and care was taken to avoid compromise. Confidentiality was observed when storing and publishing findings, to prevent identifiable information from being irresponsibly accessed.

Participant Recruitment and Sampling Strategy

I followed the directions for force field analysis described by Toves et al., (2016). The participant population consisted of human services staff and administrators from a supported employment program in Westchester County, NY. Eligible participants were identified using personal networks and informal recruitment measures. I relied on colleagues and word of mouth as a starting point to advertise the research opportunity within the organization, as well as distribute flyers to staff and administrators. Interested people received a screening questionnaire to ensure they matched the criteria to be included in the study. To choose participants, I used a purposive sampling strategy. Participants aligned with the characteristics of the research question, based on their direct involvement in providing supported employment services to adults with I/DD in the Westchester County program. Potential participants either made decisions concerning the delivery of supported employment services, managed funding and networking,

implemented job development strategies, or were directly responsible for job coaching and work site management.

The sample size consisted of nine participants; four administrators and five staff. Participants are listed by numbers, and labeled with titles Participant one, Participant two, etc., to organize quotes from the data while protecting the individuals' privacy and confidentiality. This is visible in the quotes that appear further down. The program is small. Hence, the data gathered from this sample size was enough to achieve saturation that offered an understanding of the research problem, as well as solutions for general program advancement. Once identified, participants were contacted by email, where research details, including informed consents, notification of privacy protection, and the ability to forfeit were shared.

Logic Model

This section includes a preliminary logic model for formative program evaluation used to assess staff perceptions of supported employment program outcomes for adults with I/DD in Westchester County, NY. The model includes an outline of the problem, inputs, activities, and outputs/outcomes, as well as a description of the program evaluation plan.

Figure 1

Preliminary Logic Model

NAME OF PROGRAM/PROJECT:					
Supported Employment Program for adults with I/DD in Westchester County, NY					
SITUATION:					
Evaluating staff perception of supported employment program outcomes for people with I/DD in Westchester County, NY.					
PRIORITIES/GOAL:					
Improving supported employment services offered to adults with I/DD in Westchester County, NY.					
INPUTS	OUTPUTS		OUTCOMES		
	Activities	Participants	Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
Staff Administrators	1.) Increased staff training	Clients	Disability awareness	65% increase in disability awareness	Policy changes to promote program growth
Individuals with I/DD	2.) Increased funding to hire and retain more staff	Agencies	Learning / knowledge	80% increase in staff training	95% increase in staff training
	3.) Increased relationship building with community employers.	Support Staff			
Time	4.) Develop training to offer community employers as a pathway to understand I/DD.	Administrators	Skill building	60% increase in follow up with employment agencies	Ongoing relationship with agencies & community businesses
Employers		Community Employers	Networking	55% increase in job placement	90% job placement increase
Surveys	5.) Delivering services		Employment		
	6.) Network with other service providers				
ASSUMPTIONS			EXTERNAL FACTORS		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The program targets adults with I/DD, who wish to improve their independence through employment. The program is voluntary. Staff need training to improve delivery service to clients Community employers need proper awareness and understanding of I/DD diagnoses. Employment agencies need training to maintain networking relationships with each other and community businesses. 			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in the economy Job market Cost of living Funding priorities Policy changes Discrimination / stigma 		
EVALUATION PLAN:					
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The study will address the perceptions of service staff and administrators to find out what is working well and how to improve the services of the organization’s supported employment program for adults with I/DD. Data will be collected using narrative written responses as data. The Survey Monkey platform will be used to generate two rounds of sequential survey questions given to human services staff and administrators, who provide supported employment services to adults with I/DD. The first round of survey will collect all the ideas from participants in responding to open-ended survey questions, and the second round will ask the participants to rank a presented list of ideas, which will be evaluated. 					

Protocol

I used the approach of Ashworth et al (2023) as the basis for this qualitative study, using a force field analysis research design to gather and assess factors that influence change in supported employment services for people with disabilities. This method aligned with the purpose of the study, to understand employment services being provided by the CMCS supported employment program in Westchester County, New York, and helped to determine the need for change or enhancements to the outcome of these services offered to adults with I/DD.

Narrative written responses were gathered from surveys to be used as data. To obtain results, I recruited both human services staff and administrators, who provide supported employment services to adults with I/DD at CMCS, as participants in this study. I conducted two rounds of sequential surveys using the Survey Monkey platform. The first survey collected ideas from participants by way of open-ended questions concerning their thoughts and experiences about how the supportive employment program improves services for adults with I/DD. The second round focused on asking the participants to rank a presented list of collected and analyzed ideas gathered from their responses in the first round of surveys.

The goal of this research was to add valid, reliable information to help enhance current work. As the researcher, I was responsible for ensuring the contents of the study cover the projected results. Content validity was established by first examining the research question against the use of surveys to confirm the data collection instrument could yield relevant results. Additional content validity was achieved by using a review

of existing literature to ensure survey questions aligned with the theories and concepts associated with the topic being researched. A review of literature helped highlight shortcomings, which helped to determine how questions needed to be structured to measure intended outcomes. It was evident that using surveys as a data collection instrument was sufficient to gather data that will answer the research question.

Data Collection

As the researcher, I was responsible for the data collection process in accordance with the methodology described by Toves et al., (2016). To gather data, I generated two rounds of sequential survey questions using the Survey Monkey platform and distributed them to human services staff and administrators who provide supported employment services to adults with I/DD at CMCS. Narrative written responses from participants were used as data. The first round of surveys collected all the ideas from participants in responding to open-ended survey questions, while the second round asked the participants to rank a list of common themes and ideas presented to determine the impact on the proposed change. The ranking used a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 being the lowest to 5 as the highest. Participants were given one week to complete the first round of survey responses, which were collected and categorized according to common themes. Within 2 days, the survey was redistributed to participants for ranking, with an expected four-day return time for data collection. Given additional time was needed, I provided an additional three days to allow for complete data collection from all participants. All data were collected within three weeks or less. Data were recorded electronically and safely stored on a password-encrypted drive.

While participants were not required to give a reason for withdrawal from the study, they were made aware that courtesy notice was appreciated, to prevent delays in data collection and to provide follow-up details. When exiting the study, participants were debriefed about details of the study, to include its purpose, use of their data, and their right to withdraw their data. As the researcher, I provided my contact information, as well as ways to reach the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to discuss queries or concerns. Additionally, I acknowledged their efforts to contribute to the study and offered prospective ways to get information about the results of the study. There were no requirements to return for follow-up or further study engagement.

Data Analysis

Data Analysis Plan

Data collected from participants were reviewed and assessed to ensure organization, as well as verify the research question was answered. Findings outline the outcome of the research, as data were interpreted and conclusions drawn to determine whether changes were needed to enhance the supported employment services being offered to people with I/DD in Westchester County, New York.

The initial survey responses were evaluated through reflective thematic analysis in accordance with the guidelines established by Braun and Clark (2019). This technique allowed me to familiarize myself with the qualitative data by thoroughly reading and understanding the survey responses. I found and highlighted common ideas and patterns of recurrent phrases and ideas among participants that helped me develop common themes, which were then ready to redistribute to participants for ranking in a second

survey. After collecting the second survey data set, I analyzed participant rankings of impact and importance, then used the results to draw evidence-based conclusions about the program's needs. Overall, the identified items that drove or hindered change were analyzed to determine action to be taken within the supported employment program.

Ethical Considerations for Data Collection

A key consideration when collecting data is protecting the privacy of the human participants. As the researcher I included ethical considerations in my planning, as well as ways to tackle them. Prior to my study, I obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), to ensure I addressed any concerns before proceeding. I previously secured permission, through email, from decision-making personnel to conduct my study within the organization, which eliminated concerns for unethical access to important information. A challenge was bias of participants' feedback which included their perceptions and opinions of the program's operations. The data received was carefully analyzed. Participants were identified and selected based on their role as human service staff and administrators providing supported employment services for adults with I/DD. As such, it was considered that participants would not offer their true feelings about the problem, for fear of data being shared, leaving them to face repercussions. As a result, they would not have been forthcoming with actual concerns, leading to the data collection process being disadvantaged. To offer transparency and observe ethical considerations, informed consents, I provided that outlined voluntary participation, anonymity, data collection medium, frequency of data collection method, access to and storage of

information, risks of participation, and participants' ability to opt out, should they make that decision.

Ethical concerns related to recruitment material and processes included concerns for participant coercion or power differentials, bias and privacy. While the informed consent addressed privacy and willingness to participate, I ensured I did not impose my biases on participants. Had anyone decided to withdraw their participation, the informed consent encouraged them to maintain confidentiality. To address data safety, information was on a password encrypted drive. As the research investigator, I had solo access to storage and use of data. Any identifying data were destroyed after study approval and identifiers removed before publishing.

Summary

To summarize, section 2 addressed my role as the researcher, as well as the study's purpose, project design, research methods and protocols. I included a logic model to support my formative evaluation of the program's needs and discussed ethical considerations for maintaining objective research. I offered data collection and analysis strategies, as well as clarified plans to establish content validity and sufficiency of surveys from the Survey Monkey software, as a data collection instrument to measure the responses concerning human service staff and administrators' perceptions of what is currently working well and how to add strategies to improve the services of the supported employment program at CMCS, for adults with I/DD.

Section 3 will address the results of the study and present the research outcome. Additionally, section 3 will outline themes gained from survey responses, and discuss how they align with the literature review and theoretical framework used.

Section 3: Results of the Study

Introduction

The results of the study are presented in Section 3. I discuss the analysis of the data collected in the responses to the survey questions using Braun and Clark's model (2019), the thematic analysis of the content, and discuss how the themes align with the theoretical framework used. Themes are: - supported employment programs stimulate client motivation and satisfaction with paid employment; program administrators' support of program staff; inclusivity and workplace integration; organizational systemic barriers to employment. I have provided a visual representation, using a logic model to illustrate how the written findings fit into the needs assessment for this formative program evaluation.

Research Question

The research question for the study was: What are human service staff and administrators' perceptions of the services of the organization's supported employment program for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities?

Presentation of the Results

Results are based on research that I conducted following the protocol approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). In this section, I used the method outlined by Ashworth et al., (2023) in their study, along with recommendations from Braun and Clark (2019) to assess the data gathered, and present themes extracted from the analysis of the narrative data from across the responses to the open-ended questions in the survey. I

outline the summary of their meaning, explain whether the results align with the literature review, and offer examples of quotes to support the thematic analysis.

Themes Arising from the Analysis

Themes identified represent commonalities across participant responses. Themes discussed include: - supported employment programs stimulate client motivation and satisfaction with paid employment; program administrators' support of program staff; inclusivity and workplace integration; organizational systemic barriers to employment.

Supported Employment Programs Stimulate Client Motivation and Satisfaction with Paid Employment

Client motivation and satisfaction refer to the clients, who are the service recipients of the organization, and their desire to find paid jobs, so they can build self-confidence and pursue financial independence, to have successful outcomes. The theme of human services professionals' assessment of client motivation and satisfaction was evident from the survey results. Response from Participant two suggested the supported employment program "builds confidence and self-determination." According to Participant four, the program "helps people with I/DD gain independence by placing them in inclusive jobs." Such reactions provided an outline of the perceived impactful nature of the supported employment program for people with I/DD and how their participation in the program stimulates their interest in gaining paid employment.

However, there was evidence in the form of participants' responses of the need for increased job placement efforts and support from the organization's administration, to provide greater access to paid employment for people with disabilities. Participant one

expressed concern that “as one who has had to complete ACCESS-VR applications solo for individuals looking to join the work force I do not see the department working to achieve independence for the individuals we serve.” Participant nine suggested “most opportunities are volunteer, and the individuals could benefit from better paying jobs”, which evidenced clients being engaged mostly in volunteer opportunities rather than paid jobs that would support their goals.

The theme of client motivation and satisfaction in achieving the goals of independent living aligns with Jacob (2022), as the idea of living independent, fulfilled lives is shown to motivate people to engage in supported employment. Still, there are programmatic shortcomings discussed by participants in the study that connected with Gilson et al (2022), as people with I/DD are often offered jobs where they earn little to pay them for their work. These results, supported by the literature show the potential of the supported employment program, but highlight the need for a review of the organization’s commitment and processes to help ensure better implementation of the goal to create independence.

Program Administrators’ Support of Program Staff

The theme of program administrators’ support of program staff drew both positive and critical comments from participants. The theme describes the way in which human services professionals perceived the leaders of the supported employment program build relationships with owners of businesses within the community, to ensure their clientele is understood. The theme also points to the apparent efforts made by the supported employment program administrators to educate their staff to help inform community

business owners about the nature and abilities of people with I/DD, to promote opportunities for jobs in conducive environments, with reasonable accommodation. Additionally, the theme identifies the organization staff's perceptions of how program administration fosters the wellbeing of their staff, so they are prepared to provide services to clients with I/DD within the supported employment program. Response from Participant seven suggested "[program administrators] ensure competitive job placement by building strong relationships with local businesses and matching individuals with jobs that align with their interests and strengths." Participant five indicated "the supported employment program offers basic I/DD staff training to work with individuals with disabilities," while Participant one mentioned "the administrative team communicates and offer resolution where necessary, to help keep clients with disabilities employed."

Still, a different response came from Participant six, that suggested "program administration, in my opinion, can do a better job of building relationships with businesses in the community. While they reach out to people in their circle, they can do more calling and marketing of the program." Participant two also expressed the opinion that supported employment administration could improve the way in which they support their human services staff and clients with I/DD "by engaging in community partnerships and inclusive recruitment practices-volunteer sites, promoting inclusion, providing training and offering support."

Participant eight discussed their hope that the program would "hire additional staff and train them to have more specific job readiness tasks; more individualized training to get the job done." Participant four offered that "staff could benefit from

disability employment training, so they can help potential community businesses to understand the population seeking employment.” A response from Participant three specifically highlighted the idea that the supported employment “program administration should conduct more frequent assessments to determine the I/DD clients’ job compatibility, as currently the pay is inconsistent, and positions do not match skills.”

Participants suggested the supported employment program administration would benefit from improving their efforts to support their staff and service recipients by implementing effective job matching and meaningful job placements. This connects with what Gilson et al., (2022) and their study in which they discussed the idea that the many of the jobs available to people with I/DD are incompatible positions with vague titles. The theme aligns with Nagateel (2023) as well, showing community businesses refrain from hiring people with I/DD because they lack knowledge about people with disabilities. Kim (2024) also aligns with the theme of program administrators’ support of program staff by adding that the supported employment program administrators need to improve their networking efforts with other employment programs, as well as community businesses. By broadening the network, more community businesses would become more knowledgeable about disabilities, thus increasing employment opportunities for people with I/DD. Additionally, Kim (2024) evidenced that supported employment programs can improve service outcomes by supporting job coaches with ongoing training and resources necessary for supporting the needs of clients with I/DD. Increased networking and training will help to promote the growth of the program.

Inclusivity and Workplace Integration

The theme of inclusivity refers to the way in which the supported employment program promotes workforce integration and caters to the diverse needs of its clientele. It offers insight into how individuals with I/DD can access unbiased employment opportunities in a standard setting, while feeling accepted, respected and supported to achieve their goals. Inclusivity also involves ensuring employment program staff are knowledgeable about the varying backgrounds and cultural needs of individuals served, so they can increase the likelihood of client success. The inclusivity theme is evident from Participant five, showing the supported employment program “strives to provide accessible and equitable services for individuals from all backgrounds by having their employees take cultural training classes to learn more about different ways of communicating, customs, and beliefs in regard to the individuals being served/supported.” Participant nine mentioned “by offering flexible supports, adaptive tools, and individualized coaching, we ensure that each person receives the help they need to succeed in the workplace.” Still, there is also evidence of the need for more staffing to adequately provide diverse, person-centered services for the program’s clientele. Participant two mentioned “the program offers services to people with different backgrounds and needs; however, staffing is limited, so they cannot provide optimally for each client.” Participant one reported “diversity and inclusion are at the core of how we serve our clients, but the pay is not enough to attract staff to provide for all the needs we have.”

The theme of inclusivity and workplace integration aligns with the findings of the literature review, showing that staffing shortage is a root problem that hinders the program's overall function (Bernstein & Burroughs (2024). Similarly, Stone (2023) agreed with the point that failure to secure adequate staffing will result in the program's inability to maintain inclusivity, leading to misaligned job placements, inadequate levels of support, and neglect for the needs of service recipients.

Organizational Systemic Barriers to Employment

The organizational systemic barriers to employment theme refer to hindrances within the supported employment program's person-centered approach and career development policies, as well as the training and service delivery structure, that limit opportunities for growth among service recipients. The theme outlines what human service professionals identified as core reasons that, if not addressed, will slow the program's advancement, eventually resulting in failure to help clients achieve their goals. Organizational systemic barriers included: - low staffing, lack of adequate staff training, and the inability to offer person-centered services with individualized employment goals and plans, which were evident across responses. Participant eight posited "they need more staff to provide individualized attention," while Participant three offered "there is a need for more paid opportunities for clients and a need to hire staff to help them access these jobs." Participant four added "staff need more in-depth training to understand the clients' needs and the program needs a plan to teach businesses in the community about the I/DD population. Participant seven also responded "in order to succeed, they need to

take the time to figure out what works for the program, make changes, and protect [their] assets.”

The results of the organizational systemic barriers theme align with the literature review and show lack of adequate staffing as a hindrance to the supported employment program (Bernstein & Burroughs, 2024). The theme outlines the need to improve employment success by providing structured employment training for the program’s support staff, to ensure they are supported to be able to perform the tasks specifically associated with their roles, instead of managing multiple tasks and risking burnout (Redmund et al., 2022). The organizational systemic barrier’s theme is also supported by Chaparro et al., (2024), who addressed staff shortages and burnout; showing how teaching independent job navigation skills to service recipients can increase their independence and decrease their reliance on staff. The New York Office of Budget Policy and Analysis (2023) also support the theme of systemic barriers by highlighting the need for program administration to continuously engage stakeholders, not just for staff, but for strategic planning and the execution of solution-based policies and procedures to increase the employment rate for people with disabilities in New York.

Presentation of the Final Logic Model

The final logic model supports my formative evaluation of the program’s needs, based on study results. The model includes an updated outline of the problem, inputs, activities, outputs/outcomes, and a description of the plan used to evaluate the program. Data were collected from surveys using the Survey Monkey software, to analyze the responses regarding human service staff and administrators’ perceptions of what is

currently working well and how to add strategies to improve the services of the supported employment program.

Figure 2*Final Logic Model*

NAME OF PROGRAM/PROJECT:					
Supported Employment Program for adults with I/DD in Westchester County, NY					
SITUATION:					
Evaluating staff perception of supported employment program outcomes for people with I/DD in Westchester County, NY.					
PRIORITIES/GOAL:					
Improving supported employment services offered to adults with I/DD in Westchester County, NY.					
INPUTS	OUTPUTS		OUTCOMES		
	Activities	Participants	Short-term	Medium-term	Long-term
Client Motivation and Satisfaction with Paid Employment Program Administrators' Support of Program Staff Inclusivity and Workplace Integration Organizational Systemic Barriers to Employment Time Employers Surveys	1.) Increased staff training 2.) Increased funding to hire and retain more staff 3.) Increased relationship building with community businesses. 4.) Develop training to offer community employers as a pathway to understand I/DD. 5.) Delivery of person-centered services 6.) Network with other service providers	Human Services Support Staff Program Administrators	Disability awareness Learning / knowledge Skill building Networking Paid Employment	65% increase in disability awareness among community businesses 80% increase in staff training 60% increase in networking with other employment agencies 55% increase in paid job placement Increased client enrollment	Policy changes to promote program growth Increased staffing 95% increase in staff training Ongoing relationship with agencies & community businesses 90% paid job placement increase Increased funding
ASSUMPTIONS			EXTERNAL FACTORS		
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The program targets adults with I/DD, who wish to improve their independence through employment. The program is voluntary. Staff need training to improve delivery service to clients Community businesses need proper awareness and understanding of I/DD diagnoses. Employment agencies need to establish and maintain networking relationships with each other and community businesses. 			<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Changes in the economy Job market Cost of living Funding priorities Policy changes Discrimination / stigma 		
EVALUATION PLAN:					
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The study addressed the perceptions of service staff and administrators to find out what is working well and how to improve the services of the organization's supported employment program for adults with I/DD. Data were collected using narrative written responses as data. The Survey Monkey platform was used to generate two rounds of sequential survey questions given to human services staff and administrators, who provide supported employment services to adults with I/DD. The first round of survey collected all the ideas from participants in response to open-ended survey questions, and the second round asked the participants to rank a presented list of ideas which were evaluated. 					

Summary

To summarize, in section 3, I provided a reminder of the research question and presented a thematic analysis of the study's findings. I identified and discussed four themes: - client motivation and satisfaction with supported employment; program administrators' support of program staff; inclusivity and workplace integration; and organizational systemic barriers to employment. For each theme, I emphasized the positive and constructive opinions of supported employment staff, based on their perceptions of the program. Additionally, I discussed how the themes aligned with the literature review and theoretical framework used.

Within section 4, I will conclude the study, as well as provide a reflection of my doctoral journey from a student to a human services practitioner. I will offer recommendations for the organization, based on my findings, and identify potential opportunities for advocacy.

Section 4: Conclusion and Reflections

Introduction

In this section I conclude my study by reflecting on my personal and professional growth throughout the doctoral journey. I highlight challenges faced and how they enabled me to mature from a student to a practitioner. I also offer recommendations, based on the results of the study, for the human services organization to improve its service provision for people with I/DD seeking independence through employment.

Reflection of Self

When I began my doctoral journey, I was an excited student with a dream to add another degree to my resume. Attaining a high degree was always on my checklist of self-actualization goals, and I was determined to accomplish. Since this was not my first time attending school while working, I had basic expectations for the process. However, as the course advanced, I quickly recognized that I underestimated the challenges I would face.

My biggest challenge was time management, balancing work, school and family life, while offering peer mentorship to other emerging Walden scholars. This was no easy feat. On paper, it appeared as easy as creating a schedule, setting designated study times, or engaging in self-care activities. However, reality proved different, as I often sacrificed one aspect of my life to promote the next. As such, I experienced many sleepless nights, sleepy days, struggles to meet deadlines, and little time for self-care. Still, my determination was fueled by my will to be successful. I also wanted to be an example of courage and fortitude for my family. I learned to face my fears, increase my resilience,

prioritize, and trust my ability to achieve. Though the process was challenging, I proved it was doable.

Today, as I reflect on my doctoral journey, I recognize my personal growth and am proud of my achievement. I am immensely appreciative of the process that molded me and allowed me to mature from a student to a human services practicing professional.

Reflection of Scholar-Practitioner

Reflecting on my growth as a human services practitioner, I recognize my doctoral journey helped me realize my professional identity and solidify my expertise. As a student, I was unaware of policies, procedures and processes that governed the human services profession. I was also ignorant of the expectations of my role and my potential impact on service users, clients, and colleagues in the field of human services.

With each aspect of the doctoral journey, I became more knowledgeable. I applied what I learned to my daily practice, which helped improve my work in a professional setting. Not only did my writing style improve efficiently; my speech and demeanor reflected professional growth. My critical thinking and strategic planning skills advanced, and my communication has become more effective. The transition from student to professional has reinforced my role as a necessary part of the human services field and ignited my confidence in my proficiency to make a positive impact.

Recommendations for Human Services Organization

Based on the results of my study, I can offer several recommendations for the human services organization. Firstly, the organization would benefit from improving operational efficiency. This recommendation is intended to broaden the program's scope

and facilitate the delivery of more effective services for individuals with I/DD disabilities. Increased marketing and networking would build relationships with other organizations, as well as community businesses. In so doing, the organization will be more widely associated, be able to expose clients to more varied employment opportunities and improve their chances of meeting the needs of their clientele.

I also recommend that the human services organization consider investing in their employees. By promoting a supportive culture and prioritizing employee training, the organization would have staff who are better able to meet the needs of the people served. Additionally, employees would have the skills necessary to educate community businesses about the needs of people with I/DD, thereby increasing the likelihood of paid employment to promote financial independence.

Another recommendation for the organization is to explore the implementation of an I/DD Workforce Readiness program, specific to job seekers with intellectual / developmental disabilities, and that drives job search autonomy among service recipients. This platform would feature a secure Artificial Intelligence (AI) driven application that allows clients to learn independent job search and application techniques. Using simple prompts or keywords, the system would assist users with individualized job search needs, minimizing clients' sole reliance on supported employment staff. An advanced feature of the I/DD Workforce Readiness application would allow organizations to help clients independently steer the employment process by providing opportunities to conduct mock job searches, resume submissions, and interviews. By facilitating real experiences in a model setting, the organization would enable clients to

access tools necessary for job search independence. This strategy would help to alleviate the staffing shortage concern and drive advocacy within the supported employment program.

Lastly, the human services organization should offer satisfaction surveys for staff and clients, to gain feedback about the pros and cons of the supported employment program. Such a tool will help employers understand what is working well within the program, and the systematic barriers preventing the organization's advancement. Barriers like limited staffing prevent the organization from providing person-centered services, which impedes the program's mission. Being able to hear from staff and people directly impacted by the services promotes advocacy and improves the overall service provision.

Summary

Section 4 included insight into my personal and professional growth on the doctoral journey. I reviewed barriers I encountered and discussed how they promoted my progress. In this section, I also discussed recommendations for the human services organization, based on the outcome of the study. I offered suggestions that would increase advocacy and improve the overall program.

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Appendix A: The Project

Survey study seeks people who provide Supported Employment (SEMP) services to adults with I/DD

There is a new study about the experiences of staff and administrators that could help supported employment agencies better understand and help their clients. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences and your perceptions of what is currently working and what needs to be improved in the supported employment program at CMCS to promote employment outcomes for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD).

About the study:

- Two separate rounds of survey questions that will be sent to your email for completion via Survey Monkey
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- 18 years old or older
- Employee of CMCS
- Provide direct SEMP services to adults with I/DD
- Administrator involved in policies and decisions concerning SEMP

This survey is part of the doctoral study for Janelle Bailey, a Ph.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during June 2025.

Appendix B: Survey Questions

Instructions: Please read the questions and write your responses in the space provided. Answers are based on your ideas, experiences and perceptions; there is no right or wrong answer.

- 1. In what ways do you see the supported employment program working to achieve independence for people with intellectual/ developmental disabilities?**
- 2. In your experience, how does Cardinal McCloskey Community Services help ensure competitive (paid) job placement?**
- 3. What is your experience about the best strategy for client assessments to determine job compatibility?**
- 4. What kinds of training do staff need to support clients?**
- 5. How does your program administration build relationships with employers to facilitate employment opportunities for people with intellectual/ developmental disabilities?**
- 6. What strategies does your program use to help prepare employers for hiring people with intellectual/ developmental disabilities?**
- 7. How does your program consider and provide for clients with diverse needs and backgrounds?**
- 8. What would be your recommendations for improvements within the supported employment program?**