

## Guest Editorial

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# Are we Walking Towards Integrated Employment? A Perspective from Europe and Australia

Recently, the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation* celebrated its 20th anniversary, and for this occasion published a special issue (Volume 35, Number 3, 2011) which contained the reflections of some of the most significant developers and researchers on supported employment in the United States. This special issue was filled with interesting contributions on the development status of supported employment in the United States, the most significant advances since its inception and impediments that have limited its full expansion and generalization. All these contributions are highly significant not only in the American context, but also internationally, for many of us who have “drunk” from these sources over the years to study, investigate, defend and develop a model of job placement that we find useful for all types of disabilities, focusing on the individual needs support, and effective on the basis of proven results.

However, the U.S. situation is not nearly the same as it is in Europe. There is a tradition in the development of such programs, but the European Union directives are reflected in various manners and are different in each country. For this reason, the Supported Employment programs are unable to speak of a common development framework, although the European Union of Supported Employment (EUSE), has developed significant efforts to bring common concepts and practices, even in the absence of a common development framework. Similarly, the development framework of the United States is not comparable in their characteristics and circumstances in other countries such as Australia.

Therefore, with the great availability of Paul Wehman as Editor of the journal, we decided to develop this special issue with the same impetus the 20 anniversary, but

in order to make a more extensive picture of the moment in which we stand and of the situation we face. So we have compiled the contributions of several representative authors in this field who can provide a “State of the Union” of supported employment in several European countries (UK, Norway and the Nordic countries, Netherlands, Germany and Spain) and a similar analysis performed in Australia.

Steve Beyer, professor at Cardiff University and member of the Welsh Centre for Learning Disabilities, who has been involved in studies about supported employment at national and European level, introduced the development situation of supported employment in the United Kingdom, where we found a mixed model developed for access to employment for people with disabilities. This model combines intervention in the companies, individualized supports in employment and supported employment, but lacks a defined funding system so that funding is sustained by a variety of resources available. The employment situation of disabled people in the UK seems to be getting worse according to recent analysis, although in the last ten years more individualized measures have been implemented both in companies and employment in the community. Unfortunately, people with learning disabilities, autism or mental illness still remain relatively underserved. As a result, Beyer believes there is need for adequate investment in the intensity and type of support for employment in relation to the needs of the people and believes that policies should improve the availability and flexibility of jobs, fostering inclusion through actions focused on people with disabilities.

Øystein Spjelkavik, member of the Work Research Institute in Oslo, who has conducted and taken part

in several national and European studies of supported employment, presents the situation of supported employment in Norway and the Nordic countries. In these countries, the development of supported employment has not been done at the same rate or in the same way; while Sweden and Norway began developing supported employment in the nineties, Finland and Iceland were added later to this development and in Denmark, where there are practices of similar character with the same inspiration, the concept of supported employment is not well developed. In these countries there is an abundance of evidence in the scientific literature on the effectiveness and success of supported employment. However, supported employment is still only a part, not the main measure that is developed for the employment of people with disabilities, persuading even the segregated sector to integrate workplace alternatives into the community. Supported employment is provided as an added measure by agencies and services that focus more on pre-employment training and sheltered employment. Spjelkavik believes that to achieve the necessary development of supported employment and to make it available, both basic services and more extensive, broad support is needed from governments and political leaders confronting and deconstructing the prevalence of alternative sheltered employment, and clearly defining the professional skills of specialists in supported employment.

Stefan Doose, faculty member of social pedagogy in Lensahn, member of the German Association of Supported Employment and representative of this to the European Union of Supported Employment, who has participated in various studies and research related to this subject, presents the situation of supported employment in Germany. In this country, the beginning of this methodology takes place in the late eighties and early nineties and has become an official part of the vocational rehabilitation system in recent years. Driven by the German Association, created in the mid-nineties, and after several successful experiences, it becomes the main task of the new professional integration services throughout the country to provide support in the transition and work for people with severe disabilities. The sheltered employment workplaces are required to provide support for the transition to the open labor market and all services are funded from the personal budget allocated to each user. Despite these advances most people with disabilities use traditional alternatives, a growing number use supported employment centers, and supported employment appears to be more a resource to add than the main resource to be developed. Doose concludes by

reflecting on the need for supported employment within an inclusive society; it must be a valid tool not only for the employment of people with disabilities but also for all people in the community who for various reasons may need, to access support, and keep a job.

Michael Kamp is a member of the Association of Supported Employment in the Netherlands and a representative in of this association to the European Association of Supported Employment, which has been implicated in the development of this model in different countries. He presents the state of development in the Netherlands. In this country supported employment surges through a European initiative HELIOS and a project with international partnership with Northern Ireland, Ireland, Portugal and later Spain. As in Germany, several successful experiences in the late eighties and early nineties, mainly in the region of Rotterdam, and financed by European funds, accounted for the subsequent creation of an Association of the Netherlands and the implementation of the model. In the mid nineties the longstanding legislative framework for supported employment shifted from sheltered employment centers to Supported Employment Projects. In 2006, the Dutch Association was re-established. Currently supported employment is used, although there is still a major struggle against the sheltered employment centers and disability allowances, which limit participation in employment. It is expected that a new law will propose a better framework with more focus on developing the skills of people to encourage them into employment. Kamp suggests the need to restructure the reality of sheltered employment, enhance the role of the job coach and encourage the assessment, analysis of results and effectiveness of organizations, especially in these times of scarcity.

Borja Jordán de Urríes and Miguel Angel Verdugo, professors and researchers from the Institute of Community Integration, University of Salamanca, where they have developed several national and European studies in this field, members of the Spanish Association of Supported Employment, and for Borja, being representative of the same to the European Partnership, present the latest European contribution focused on Spain. Supported employment emerged in Spain with processes similar to those in Germany and the Netherlands. But in Spain, the development of employment centers has been particularly strong with a very strong structure of employers that organizations of disabled people have defended and promoted to the administration, sometimes over the more inclusive alternative. This has led to the need to have clear, regulatory

frameworks with stable funding for sheltered employment, compared with a lack of regulation of supported employment until 2007, which had been unsatisfactory, poorly developed and lacked resources or stable funding. Most legislative developments in the last twenty years have favored the use of sheltered employment, against job placement in ordinary business and given support. Jordán de Urríes and Verdugo consider legislative developments that set regular employment as the primary goal with a restructuring of sheltered employment centers, and a reorientation of social investment from administration essential to boosting supported employment and establishing a fully inclusive integration as a priority over others.

We round out this issue with a perspective from Australia. As founder and director of Job Support, an initiative to open employment services for people with intellectual disabilities, Phil Tuckerman accumulated great experience in the development of supported employment. He presents the current state of supported employment in Australia, which helps us get a perspective of supported employment outside Europe and the U.S. The concept of open employment was introduced into Australia by law in the second half of the eighties, and is comparable to supported employment. In the past 26 years, open employment has developed the implementation of a database that enables

analysis and performance monitoring and development of a funding system based on individual support needs and outcomes, implementation of effectiveness criteria for services and penalties for inefficiency, and the flow of financing for those who opt for regular employment. However, in spite of these developments in recent years, growth has stalled and more users are involved in alternatives that are less inclusive. Tuckerman reflects on the need to review issues such as eligibility criteria or incentives to participate in these programs as well as increased support to providers of such services. Although not part of the invited manuscripts for this issue, a special report of interest on autism and work by Hanna Bertilsdotter Rosqvist and Britt-Inger Keisu from Sweden was added to complete this issue.

It is our hope that these articles will help colleagues gain a perspective of the course and current status of integrated employment in Europe and Australia.

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