

October 2019

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Peggy Muth
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Recommended Citation

Muth, P. (2019). Assessing the Need for a Job Coaching Curriculum in the Baltimore-Washington Area. *JADARA*, 28(4). Retrieved from <https://repository.wcsu.edu/jadara/vol28/iss4/6>

ASSESSING THE NEED FOR A JOB COACHING CURRICULUM IN THE BALTIMORE-WASHINGTON AREA

Peggy Muth¹

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The trend to move consumers from sheltered workshop settings into community employment has created new career paths for rehabilitation professionals. One of these career paths is that of a Job Coach. Currently, in the Baltimore-Washington area, there are no formal programs preparing college students to enter this emerging profession. A survey was conducted in the Baltimore-Washington area, and a subsequent review of the literature was performed to determine if there was a need for a college level curriculum to prepare individuals to become Job Coaches to work with consumers who are deaf. The results of the survey and review of the literature are included. Based on the results of the survey, a suggested course outline, as the beginning of a curriculum, is described.

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In 1986, the amendments to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, defined supported employment for consumers with severe disabilities (including deafness) and required that states provide these individuals with the services necessary to maintain employment. The trend to move consumers from sheltered settings into community employment was established. Following this legislation, consumers with significant disabilities resulting in impediments to employment who were being moved into community employment now needed support on the job. Depending on the specific needs of the individual, some of these on-the-job supports included minor job modifications, but other more extensive supports required that professionals be available to ensure that the individual was performing the job as required and that the company was realizing a gain from the individual's employment there. Thus a new career, that of a Job Coach, was created.

Initially, job coaching primarily targeted consumers with mental retardation. The Job Coach traditionally had a high school diploma and was responsible for working side by side with the consumer performing the same job. When the consumer failed to perform the job as expected or was absent from work, the Job Coach was supposed to complete the job duties.

¹Peggy Muth, Developmental Services Group, Inc., 9380 Gerwig Lane, Columbia, MD 21046-1531

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The Job Coach's responsibilities were fairly routine and required very little professional expertise.

With the Reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act in 1992, there was an increased emphasis upon priority to those individuals with the most significant disabilities resulting in impediments to employment. Consequently, job coaching was initiated successfully with consumers who had other disabilities; and the job coaching duties began to expand. Since that time the Job Coach has become the person responsible for providing many of the supports necessary to ensure that the consumer obtains and maintains employment in the community.

The duties of a Job Coach have varied from agency to agency depending on the needs of the consumers and the agency's focus or type of funding. Common duties of a Job Coach may include: performing job analysis, job development, job placement, sign language interpreting, conducting family meetings, teaching the consumer to use public transportation, report writing, market analysis, training employers, trouble-shooting on the job, conflict resolution, teaching a sign language course to employees, informal counseling, arranging medical appointments, communicating with state and federal agencies, and community education.

The combination of business knowledge and counseling skills needed for successful job coaching are unique to this profession. In order for a Job Coach to be successful, one must be aware of current business trends, for example: changes in production rates; how a recession affects employment opportunities; what industries are growing or downsizing. In addition, the Job Coach must be able to offer employers suggestions for modifying the work place should the consumer need accommodations. At the same time, the Job Coach must be skilled in working with the emotional impact that the transition to community employment will have on the consumer and the family.

In one state, reported causes of problems that Job Coaches experienced were: failure to educate employers about the role of a Job Coach, conflict in employer relations, faulty assumptions about the business operations, inadequate job matching and lack of family support (Couch, 1993). Where does one obtain the foundation for learning the skills to address these situations, if not in a formal career preparation program?

According to the literature, Job Coaches receive little or no preparation, formal or otherwise, prior to assuming their duties. In a national survey of Job Coaches (Agosta, Brown, & Milda, 1994, p. 4), it was reported that:

1. About one third of Job Coaches list high school as their highest educational achievement. Of those indicating some amount of college or university training, 64% note that they had no specific instruction regarding supported employment during college.

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2. Before beginning work as a Job Coach, 51% reveal that they were given eight hours or less in training on supported employment.

In addition, the authors stated that "...employers are expressing concern about ill-prepared or misguided Supported Employment professionals occasionally coming into a business setting. They do not want "extra people" on the work floor who are uncertain of their roles and who get in the way or complicate things. Parents, (family members) too are asking for a coherent answer to what supported employment offers and what kind of support Job Coaches provide. Supported employees with disabilities themselves often express uncertainty about the role of their "support staff" on their job site. Finally, Supported Employment direct service staff often have expressed a need for greater respect and professionalism for their work in the field" (p. 4).

Frank Rusch (1986, p. 11) stated that for individuals with severe disabilities one employment obstacle is "inadequate personnel preparation programs. Universities are lagging behind in preparing professionals for adult service staff roles" (p. 11). A review of the literature up to 1975 (Davis & Bullis, 1986) revealed that there was no research available which indicated that staff working with consumers who were deaf were prepared to address the career/vocational needs of these individuals. And lastly in a discussion of Ethics in Supported Employment, Patterson, Buckley, & Smull (1989) stated that ["supported employment pushes many counselors beyond their current experiential range"] (p. 18).

Throughout the literature, lack of trained staff is cited as a barrier for providing quality services to consumers. McCrone & Payette (1989) express concern that lack of qualified deafness rehabilitation personnel is a subtle, but devastating form of discrimination against consumers who are deaf and in need of rehabilitation services.

This trend appeared to be true in the Baltimore-Washington area, as well. With seven agencies providing supported employment to individuals who are deaf, an informal telephone survey, conducted for this article, revealed that no agency has staff members who received any formal preparation in Job Coaching prior to their employment. Additionally, there are approximately ten higher education institutions in the Baltimore-Washington area which offer sign language courses and/or career paths in areas of deafness. None of these institutions offers Job Coaching as a career path option or as part of its official curriculum. Therefore the need for formally assessing this concern resulted in the survey described below.

Survey Methods and Results

The survey of three questions was distributed to 82 people in September 1993. Names were obtained through TTY directories, personal contacts, advocacy groups, schools and VR. The survey was mailed to VR counselors (RCD's and others), consumers, therapists, social

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workers, teachers, guidance counselors, vocational evaluators, Job Coaches, college professors, family members, interpreters, advocates. Respondents were given four weeks to reply to the survey.

The instructions for completing the survey required that all questions be answered related to Job Coaching of consumers who are deaf and who may be considered developmentally disabled (low functioning/traditionally underserved), as this is the population which is frequently cited in the literature as needing supports on the job (Danek, Seay & Collier, 1989; Larew, Long & Mittal, 1993; Mathay & Lafayette, 1990; Watson, 1990).

Questions number one and two were to be answered by circling "yes" and "no." A comments section was included at the end of each of the three questions.

Included with the survey was an introductory letter and a return envelope. Forty people (49%) responded to the survey.

1. Do you think there is a shortage of Job Coaches to work with consumers who are deaf?

In response to this question, 36 (92%) responded "Yes." Comments under this question addressed the concern that the shortage may be due to both lack of funding and lack of training. Again, there was the emphasis that Job Coaches skilled in sign language and deaf culture represent the biggest shortage. Responses from consumers included expressions of frustration in having to wait from several months to over one year to obtain the services of a Job Coach.

2. Do you think there is a need for college-level training to prepare individuals to become Job Coaches (i.e. as a part of the curriculum for Education, Psychology, Social Work or Rehabilitation majors)?

In response to question number two, 35 (90%) responded "Yes." Subjective comments included argument for a curriculum to be a part of a two year Associate's degree program as opposed to a Bachelor's or Master's level program. Some respondents felt that no college level preparation was necessary, but suggested that some kind of formal training program (i.e. a six week course, all day workshops, etc.) was warranted. The survey did not address these issues, but it is believed any training will be useful and will fill a need that is not currently being met.

3. If a college-level curriculum were developed to train Job Coaches, what are the three major topics you would like to see emphasized?

The three major topic areas suggested were summarized as follows:

- 37% Deaf awareness/ASL/communication skills/Deaf culture/Psychosocial aspects of deafness

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- 35% Job development/Job restructuring/understanding the needs of the business world/ADA
- 28% Managing consumer behaviors/counseling

Discussion

A 1989 Statewide Needs Assessment conducted in the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area, reported that three of the top five identified employment needs of deaf individuals were: Job Coaching, job placement, supported employment. Statistics from the report and current literature indicate that there are approximately 9,500 individuals who are deaf and who live in the Baltimore-Washington area who could benefit from Job Coaching services. In addition, of the number of deaf individuals who could benefit from these services in the Baltimore-Washington area, there are no more than a handful of Job Coaches available. Currently, there are no college level programs in the Baltimore-Washington area preparing people to fill jobs in this emerging field. Students may not even be aware that Job Coaching is a career alternative.

The benefits of developing a curriculum to prepare individuals to become Job Coaches will have far reaching effects in the rehabilitation field. Initially, agencies will benefit as there will be a pool of career trained Job Coaches from whom to choose when filling positions. Subsequent to that, consumers will receive better training as they will have qualified staff providing services. Consumers will no longer be the OJT experience for a Job Coach unfamiliar with the profession. Having a qualified Job Coach will help ensure opportunities for the consumer's success. In the long run, having better qualified staff will mean a monetary saving for agencies, as well as improved services for consumers. In addition, more careers will be opened up for professionals who are deaf. Through the experience of working with a Job Coach who is deaf, the business community will learn more about deafness and consumers will have positive role models. Just as the emergence of the RCD positions in the 1980s changed the way the rehabilitation field provided services, so too, the development of the Job Coaching career is the next step toward expanding improved services to the consumer.

Based on the results of the survey and a review of the literature, there appears to be a clear need in the Baltimore-Washington area for a college level curriculum to train Job Coaches. A fifteen week college level course, consisting of one-hour classes, was developed from the survey and serves as a basis for the beginning of such a curriculum.

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"Job Coaching 101"

Prerequisites:

1. High ratings on Sign Language proficiency examination
2. Course in Psychosocial Aspects of Deafness

Class #1

Introduction:

Why does a person who is deaf need a Job Coach?

Class #2

The Service Delivery System:

Supported employment continuum
Consumer rights
Confidentiality

Class #3

Legislation:

ADA

Rehab Act and Subsequent Amendments
Developmental Disabilities Act
IDEA

Class #4

Goal setting:

Informal assessment
Work samples/job simulation

Class #5

Marketing:

Job development
Cold calling

Class #6

Placement:

Job analysis
Job Matching

Class #7

Job Coaching:

Behavior plans in the work place
Improving work speed/work behaviors
Trouble shooting

Class #8

Role of the Job Coach:

Interpreter
Advocate
Trainer
Counselor
Role model

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Class #9

Public relations within a company:

Job restructuring
Reasonable accommodations
Employee training

Class #10

Follow along:

Providing feedback
Self-advocacy on the job
Developing a follow-up schedule

Class #11

Establishing Supports:

Social Security Work Incentives
Natural supports in the work place
Developing community support networks

Class #12

Working with families/residential providers:

Coordination of effort
Confidentiality
Socialization
Independence
Community resources

Class #13 & 14

Visits to Job Sites:

Clerical/office
Factory/assembly
Food service
Retail
Stock clerk

Class #15

Case studies

*Note: This study was the result of the author's participation in the PET-D Program at San Diego State University

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