

## **Job Development and Placement**

One society is "better" than another if a greater number of its people have access to experiences that are aligned with their goals. —Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, psychologist and author

The issue of jobs for people with disabilities has become a central focus of disability policy in America. This goal has influenced social policy in part because of the general desire to support opportunity and fairness in our society, as exemplified in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 (PL 101-336). An equally compelling reason is the rising cost of disability entitlement programs in America and the desire to promote employment for those individuals with disabilities who want to work. Whatever the reasons for promoting this policy, there is agreement that work is an essential cultural ingredient in America and represents the major path to achieving high quality of life. Although the goodness of work has been an accepted value underlying social policy in postindustrial America, the data on employment and labor force participation of people with disabilities are not consistent with this value. For example, analysis of employment data (Houtenville, 2001a) showed an employment rate of men with disabilities to be only 34%, compared with a 95% rate of employment for men without disabilities. Similarly, women with disabilities had an employment rate of only 29.5%, compared with 80.8% for women without disabilities. The income gap between workers with disabilities and their nondisabled counterparts is also large (Houtenville, 2001b). The average household income of men with disabilities was only about \$12,000, compared with more than \$28,000 for men without disabilities. Despite decades of policy emphasizing the financial and social benefits of employment, having a disability in America remains associated with unemployment and lower wages. This chapter provides an overview of historical barriers to employment for people with disabilities, reviews applicable legislation and social policy that have affected employment of people with disabilities, and introduces a theoretical structure for building networks and developing partnerships with employers that will help generate employment outcomes that are consistent with societal values and policy intent.

## **BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT**

Many reasons are offered to explain the persisting poor employment data for individuals with disabilities. Essentially three major barriers to employment participation have been identified in the literature: the disincentives of the Social Security benefits programs, misinformed attitudes toward individuals with disabilities,

and lack of access to appropriate rehabilitation and employment search interventions that result in paid employment.

## **Policy Disincentives**

One major barrier frequently mentioned in the literature is the impact of public support programs, particularly those administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA) (LaPlante, Kennedy, Kaye, & Wenger, 1996; Noble, 1998). Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) not only provide monthly income support for eligible beneficiaries, but also health insurance coverage through one of the federal programs, Medicaid or Medicare. SSA benefits may operate as employment disincentives, a fact made clear by the numbers. For example, fewer than 1% of SSDI and SSI beneficiaries leave the rolls each year as a result of obtaining paid employment. Of those who do leave, about one third return within 3 years (The Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program, 2001). Furthermore, studies by the SSA have pointed to a programmatic correlation between growth of the beneficiary programs and lowered labor force participation rates for individuals with disabilities (Muller, 1992). Smaller studies focusing on the effect of compensation on employment outcomes have found that resistance to seeking competitive employment is greater among individuals who were receiving Social Security benefits (Nichols, 1989) and that the availability of income compensation programs corresponds to withdrawal Working Relationships from the labor force (Drew et al., 2001). However, it is important to note that periodic surveys of beneficiaries with disabilities indicate an expressed desire to work (LaPlante et al., 1996), suggesting that it is not the availability of the compensatory benefits that discourages employment but the fear of losing associated health benefits. The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 (PL 106-170), a major revision of social security law, is designed to ease the transition from benefits to employment by providing continuing access to federal health insurance programs. The effect of this law on employment outcomes remains unknown, and its provisions are discussed later in this chapter.

## **Employer and Societal Attitudes**

Another barrier is employer attitudes toward and perceptions about individuals with disabilities. When Congress passed the ADA, it acknowledged that employer attitudes toward individuals with disabilities have historically had a negative impact on employment, stating that the intention of the act was to "eliminate discrimination against individuals with disabilities" (Section 12101[B][1]). The recognition of discrimination was based on various sources of evidence, including the historically poor performance of employers in providing workplace opportunity to individuals with disabilities and surveys of employer attitudes toward job seekers with disabilities

(Unger, 2002a). Employer attitudinal surveys have consistently found that employers report the same stereotypical attitudes and myths about workers with disabilities as did the general population. For example, employers tend to have the most negative attitudes toward job seekers with emotional or mental disabilities (Drehmer, 1985; Johnson, Greenwood, & Schriener, 1988) and express general concern regarding work performance and quality of workers with disabilities (Blanck, 1998; Minskoff, Sautter, Hoffmann, & Hawks, 1987). Although some surveys of employer willingness to hire individuals with disabilities reflect more positive attitudes (Hernandez, 2000; Levy, Jessop, Rimmerman, Francis, & Levy, 1993), negative stereotypes toward some individuals with disabilities persist as barriers to workplace opportunity (Cook & Razzano, 1994; Unger, 2002a). Thus, passage of the ADA with the stated intention of ending discrimination was an important effort in reducing attitudinal barriers. The extent to which the ADA is succeeding in this effort is discussed later in the chapter.

### **Access to Employment Assistance**

The third barrier to labor force participation is the lack of effective employment programs. One source of vocational rehabilitation (VR) for individuals with disabilities in America is the public or federal VR program system. This system, existing in all states and U.S. territories, was founded in 1917 and is the only program designed to provide a variety of VR services to adults with disabilities in order to prepare them to enter or re-enter the workplace (Rubin & Roessler, 1995). The public VR system is distinguished by its ability to offer an array of service options tailored to individual job seeker needs. However, unlike special education services, the public VR system is not an entitlement program, and its funding reflects its limited capacity. For example, in the fiscal year (FY) 1999, about 1.3 million individuals were served nationally in the system. An estimated 60% were identified as successfully rehabilitated, and those cases were closed. This is only a fraction of working-age adults with disabilities who are eligible for VR services (Research Triangle International, 2003). Other public entities, such as state mental health and developmental disability administrations, also fund services for individuals with disabilities, particularly those with the most severe cognitive and emotional impairments. Historically, state funds have been used to support facility-based programs, such as sheltered workshops for people with significant disabilities, including mental illness and mental retardation (Polloway, Smith, Patton, & Smith, 1996). Since the 1990s, supported employment programs began to feature rapid entry into competitive employment and long-term employment supports, and consumers, families, and professionals have come to prefer this service option (Podmostko, 2000). Again, supported employment programs have inadequate public funding, which has limited their availability. For example, Mank, O'Neill, and Jensen's national study (1998) estimated that for every person who received supported employment services,

as many as seven or eight people who could have benefited from these services did not receive them. Thus, even when effective employment intervention programs are available, inadequate public funding of these programs has limited the programs' capacity to help those who need and want their services.

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