

How to Assess for Success

Keeping in Mind the Welfare of the Welfare Recipient

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Abstract

The Statement "if you expect nothing of someone, then nothing is what you will receive" applies when individuals reside in a world that doesn't allow them to learn to care for themselves.

Evaluation/Assessment is an integral part of the employment process that allows individuals the opportunity to gain self-awareness and take ownership over their life. The individual takes an active role in the career planning and job search process. In January of 1994, Indiana began Welfare Reform with the development of the Indiana Manpower Placement and Comprehensive Training-IMPACT-Program. Indiana was one of the first states to incorporate "Work First" as an important component in Welfare reform. "Workfirst" facilitates job placement by requiring a higher proportion of recipients to be participating in work activities for an increased amount of hours. Consequently, this limits the extent of time that education and training count as work activities. In 1995, recipients were asked to sign a Personal Responsibility Agreement acknowledging that it is their own responsibility to secure and retain a job with the assistance and support of the community. In 1996, President Clinton signed The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act. The emphasis in the 21st Century will be services to support our working families. One of the main reasons Rauch, Inc. was granted a two-year contract in 1997 was its emphasis on the crucial component of assessments in determining and understanding both an individual's abilities, barriers for employment and what supports are needed for that individual to become successfully employed. The program is based on the Supported Employment Model. The research conducted in the preparation and writing of this paper found few published articles on Welfare Reform and Assessment. The co-authors of this paper will present the design, set-up,

implementation and outcomes of a welfare initiative program based on a strong and diverse evaluation/assessment process that is very different from a traditional vocational evaluation. The evaluation/assessment serves as a basis for vocational planning and learning for the individual allowing each person to focus on his/her individual interests and abilities. The learning process allows the individual to gain information about him/herself and increase self-awareness. The Supported Employment approach is an excellent model for individuals with disabilities who typically have significant barriers to employment. Individuals receiving welfare benefits meet the same criteria in that they are not able to sustain and maintain employment, given the mix of social, emotional, physical and economic barriers and a lack of support systems each person experiences. Some participants may also have a disability that has not been identified and diagnosed by a professional. In view of this, there was an apparent need to set up a Welfare-to-Work program based on the Supported Employment Model.

Over a nineteen-month period, from July of 1997 through February 28, 1999, Rauch, Inc. received 670 referrals. There were 298 active participants with 282 participating in assessment, 136 completing that process, and 257 placements occurring. There have been 97 successful program closures and there are 67 participants stable on the job receiving follow-along services. Currently there are 137 individuals in active job search. Rauch Inc. holds a contract of service with Clark and Floyd Counties in Southern Indiana.

INTRODUCTION

Rauch Inc. designed a Welfare-to-Work Initiative based on the Supported Employment Model. This model utilizes evaluation/assessment as the basis for the development of a career path for each individual that promotes a transition from dependence on the welfare system to one of personal responsibility and self-support. An individual cannot develop personal responsibility in the employment process unless they are actively involved in the vocational assessment and planning process. Quality assessment is critical if we are to serve our participants well. The structure of this program provides a cohesive support system for our participants that allows them to make change, to take charge, to anticipate success instead of failure, and to commit to responsibility for their own life changes.

Across the nation, welfare participants have typically been summoned to appear at the contract provider's door with a fear of the unknown, a questionable attitude, loss of dignity and very little personal responsibility for their own economic futures. A vocational plan is written with the objective of fast track employment. Job Development and Placement Tracks focus on getting the recipient employed quickly without the needed information provided through assessment to allow for a good job match. In contrast, through this particular assessment process and the Supported Employment approach participants gain information about their interests, aptitudes, learning styles, general education levels and temperaments in terms that are meaningful to both participants and employers. The information they gain about themselves enhances their self-awareness and encourages them to think and act independently.

PROGRAM DESIGN

The program design is based on the Supported Employment model. The Supported Employment model simply defined means "competitive work in an integrated work setting with on-going support services for individuals for whom competitive employment has not traditionally occurred, or has been interrupted or intermittent" (Maddalena, 1992). The basis of this model lies in providing necessary supports around an individual to enhance his/her skills and skill acquisition, while finding employment situations that reflect his/her strengths, needs, abilities and preferences. The focus of Supported Employment is a place-and-train model versus a train-and-place model as was traditionally applied when working with this population. If a person gets a job that best fits all the criteria stated above, he/she will be more likely to maintain long term employment success. This model is designed for those individuals who require moderate to intensive supports, both initial and/or long term, to be successful. The individualized long term support approach is also conducive to assisting participants in an upward hourly wage movement mode toward better employment and economic self-sufficiency. This model utilizes the resources of the community and the employment setting to trouble shoot problems and build positively on the abilities and strengths specific to each participant.

There are ten staff dedicated to the Welfare-to-Work Initiative at Rauch, Inc. This includes seven Employment Consultants, one clerical support person, a Manager and a Vocational Evaluator. The Employment Consultants carry a caseload of around 30 to 40 participants. They are involved in every phase of the process from the initial referral to follow-along and closure utilizing a generalist model.

The clear objective of obtaining a good job match for the participants utilizes vocational evaluation/assessment as a professional discipline which utilizes a systematic appraisal process to identify an individual's vocational potential (VEWAA, 1993). Vocational evaluation/assessment should be the basis for planning needed services, resources and support; therefore, it can be an integral part of the total service delivery system (VEWAA, 1993). The Vocational evaluation/assessment process is essential in the design of the Welfare-to-Work Program.

PROGRAM SET-UP

The following components outline and define the set up of the program design for the Evaluation/Assessment and Job Search program. The authors will discuss their implementation of the actual program operation in the next section.

Orientation

Orientation occurs at the Local County Division of Family and Children. This is the point of entry for participants to see the connection between the county office and the service provider. During orientation, the service provider provides a brief overview of services that occur upon referral to Rauch, Inc. Participants are advised of what to expect from the assessment and job search process. They are given a contact name and number to call if there are questions prior to the assessment and job search process.

Referral

Participants are referred from the County Division of Family and Children. Referral information comes in the form of a name, address, telephone number and a plan for self-sufficiency. Background information is not provided in the area of employment, education, social, psychological or medical information. All information must be gleaned through the assessment process.

Intake

Home visits are scheduled and Intake occurs at the time of that visit. Background information is obtained during intake. Behavioral observation occurs in the participant's home environment.

Group Sessions

There are scheduled sessions that occur in three different environments. Many friendships are formed within the realm of these group sessions. Through the outlined activities, staff is obtaining needed information about each participant through informal and formal observation and standardized testing in a variety of environments. In essence, every activity completed is an additional assessment tool. The sessions include:

- Program Description and Evaluation that encompasses an overview of program requirements and expectations for participants.
- SAGE Comprehensive Vocational Battery to assess aptitudes, interests, learning styles, temperaments, worker attitudes, and General Educational Levels.
- Skills Identification
- Job Readiness activities dealing with the world of work; interviewing skills, completing applications, references, resume writing, goal setting, and how, where and when to look for the right job.

- Soft Skills Training covering self-esteem, grooming and hygiene, values, time management, body language, following directions, and interpersonal relationships.
- Group and Individual Counseling including stress management, coping skills, parenting, skills, and juggling responsibilities.
- Outside Speaker Presentations by potential employers, former successful participants, Temporary Job Placement Services, and Community Resources and Services.

Evaluation/Assessment Interpretive Summary Report

This session guides the participant into their future planning process. The results of the assessment are shared with each individual participant in a private counseling session.

Self-Directed Job Search

The process of looking for a job is facilitated by the participant and supported by the Employment Consultant.

Job Placement

The Participant obtains employment in a viable position that will lead to self-sufficiency.

Follow-Along

Follow-Along is the service we provide to support and advocate for participants and assure retention on the job.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

The Program Manager attends the TANF and Food Stamp Orientation for participants at the County Office of the Division of Family and Children (DFC). This first step allows the participants to actively see the interaction and collaboration of the DFC and the contracted employment service provider. The participants are given an overview of the assessment/evaluation and job search program. The role of the provider and the participant are outlined. They are given a contact person and number to call if they have any questions or concerns about the up-coming group sessions. After orientation, an official referral form is sent to the provider. Once a referral is received, the information is entered into a database and the participants are assigned to an Employment Consultant's caseload. The Employment Consultant is a trained professional dedicated to treating each participant as an individual to be respected and valued. The personal attention, style and manner of working with participants are essential components in facilitating and fostering each person's long term success. Nothing can substitute for the positive power and influences of quality staff persons. The effectiveness of staff is the lifeblood necessary in determining the amount and degree of positive outcomes.

The Employment Consultant's first contact with a participant usually occurs in the form of a home visit. In some situations, the home visit is preceded by a phone call to schedule the visit. During the home visit, an official intake form is filled out and life situations and barriers to employment are identified. The assessment process actually begins during this initial home visit. Behavioral observations of the participant in his/her home environment occur and the employment consultant obtains a working knowledge of the many obstacles the participant faces. The most crucial aspect of the home visit is the development of a trusting, respectful, quality relationship between the Employment Consultant and the participant. The participant values having someone he/she can trust for supportive and sympathetic advice. Building that rapport is not easy and repeated attempts may have to be made before establishing the quality of communication necessary for effective services and outcomes to occur. To make the relationship personal and supportive rather than bureaucratic, our Employment Consultants' caseloads

remain relatively low between 30-40 people in different stages of the program. Home visits have contributed to an increased participation rate in the group sessions.

The group sessions start every three weeks with a new group of referrals and last for a period of twelve working days. The participants are required to attend these activities from 9:00am –12:00pm on the scheduled days. Transportation is provided when needed and support is given on finding quality childcare. The first group session begins with a more extensive description of the program's expected outcomes. A discussion is facilitated by staff to stimulate participants thinking about their own personal responsibility for making needed changes in their life by setting short and long term goals. We encourage them to identify their dreams and strengths and plant in their minds the knowledge of how these components can move them in a new direction. Incorporated throughout the group sessions are a variety of activities that allow personal growth and self-awareness. These activities include, goal setting, action steps needed to reach those goals, resume writing, interviewing skills, and selling yourself to a potential employer. Most of the group activities have an interactive component and the participants are comfortable talking about themselves and converse freely with each other. An important aspect of the group sessions is making the activities fun. When individuals enjoy what they are doing, more effective learning occurs. Role-playing is an effective method used to increase the comfort level of a participant. Staff can assess the participants' need for additional training and support as they are challenged to practice both a "one-minute sell" and the overall interviewing process.

The formal assessment tool is The System for Assessment and Group Evaluation (SAGE). The SAGE provides measures of GED levels, twelve areas of interest and the eleven specific aptitudes. The assessments are administered in a group setting. The SAGE Battery includes: Interest Inventory, Worker Temperaments and Attitudes, General Education Levels and CITES Learning Style, General Learning, Verbal, Numerical, Spatial, Form Perception, Color Discrimination, Clerical Perception, Motor Coordination, Finger and Manual Dexterity, and Eye-Hand-Foot Coordination. The Vocational Interest Inventory identifies vocational interests related to the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT), twelve interest areas, sixty-six work groups and ten interest factors. The Vocational Aptitude Battery identifies strengths and weaknesses for the eleven DOT's aptitudes. The Cognitive Abilities Test identifies Reasoning, Math, and Language Development relating to the DOT's General Educational

Development Levels. The Job Temperament identifies positive temperaments relating to the DOT's job Temperament. The Worker Attitude assesses attitudes and behaviors relative to on-the-job situations. (Kass, 1985).

Group Counseling covers stress management, coping and parenting skills and the additional, complex responsibility of juggling work and family. The counseling sessions are facilitated by certified counselors funded through a grant obtained through Metro United Way Funds. The counseling sessions are informational and promote quality discussions within the group. The need for individual counseling is identified through the assessment process. Participants are given the opportunity to participate in private individual counseling at no cost to them. The Life Skills sessions are also funded through a Metro United Way Grant. The sessions are taught by a collaborative organization that specializes in this area. The collaborative organization provides a training site, GED classes and special presentations on issues closely affecting the participants. The classes are not focused on work skills, but rather on total life skills that will aid and support participants in their overall growth and development. Classes include the topics of self-esteem, grooming and hygiene, time management, emotional well being, and relationship issues. Special speakers are brought in as group presenters that open the participants up to opportunities, services and resources in the areas that are available to them. Topics can include healthy relationships and domestic violence issues, employment opportunities, participants sharing personal experiences and successes, and other outside community resources available to them.

The Evaluation/Assessment Interpretive Report is presented to the participant in an individualized counseling session at the completion of the group activities. It is during this time that the participants actually begin to map out their career path. This session gives the participant an increased awareness of their strengths and needed areas of training and improvement. Guidance is given to them as they establish their own personal plan toward the direction of self-sufficiency and independence from the welfare system.

The job search process begins at referral and continues throughout the above outlined activities. The participants are guided in their search and some of them do find positions before the completion of the group activities. The participants that remain in active status are supported in many ways in their job search. Through assessment and group activities, a more specific plan of action to find the best job

match is created. An interim plan may include a Community Work Experience Program (CWEP). It is understood by the participants that time limits their participation in a community work experience (CWEP) in order to stay in compliance with their self-sufficiency plan. While the participant may be involved in a CWEP, the Employment Consultant continues to assist the participant in their search for a higher level position. Entry level work experience often leads to greater job satisfaction. The level of involvement that the Employment Consultant has with the participants varies according to the level of independence and motivation of each individual. Rauch, Inc has working relationships with 150 area employers who contact us when they have job openings; some also allow group tours. It is extremely important for service providers to develop a good business relationship based on open communication with employers hiring participants. The job development process is enhanced by having job leads and contact names in a variety of occupational fields. The assessment results give the participant the knowledge of personal skills and/or aptitudes that they can present to employers in the interviewing process.

Job placement is the ultimate goal of any employment program. Our goal is to support participants in moving permanently out of the welfare system through placement in a full time position, at a sustainable wage with health benefits. At the time of placement, the Employment Consultant is available to the participant for on the job coaching, training and employment advocacy. Many participants do not want or need the one on one (1:1) support on the job; however, they typically welcome and appreciate the overall support in the life changes that occur once they are employed. Leaving welfare is a process not an event. Getting a job is only one in a long sequence of steps: building confidence, developing personal skills, acquiring job readiness skills and triumphing over setbacks. Participants who have found stable employment and mastered their personal circumstances often encounter reversals. (Hershey, 1997)

“Follow-along” is the critical support service Rauch staff provides for up to 6 months after job placement. Staff continues to support, monitor and advocate for participants to assure job retention. They identify issues that may threaten employment. Similar issues in pre-placement may continue to be a concern in follow-along status. Transportation and childcare issues initially resolved are likely to require additional or alternative plans (2nd, 3rd shift or sick childcare). The Employment Consultant supports the participant in locating available community resources in these and other areas of concern. Developing

new resources and more user-friendly processes in the areas of transportation and childcare is occurring at the local and regional levels through the Local Planning Councils for Welfare-to-Work.

The Employment Consultant is available to work through motivational and interpersonal issues (work place behavior), and general life changes (increased pressure, feeling overwhelmed, money management). The Employment Consultant will often refer back to the assessment results to emphasize the skills that identified and take into account areas of sensitivity or frailty. The assessments are a self-motivating force because they increase self-awareness and self-esteem. Employment Consultants will contact the employers to monitor the participant's progress on the job and can provide mediation to defuse or resolve conflicts and misunderstandings that could undermine job stability. Employers also have the option to call the Employment Consultant if any concerns arise that staff can address quickly, better assuring the security of the participant's employment status. The working relationship the service provider has with the employer, especially in the areas of service responsiveness and quality "intervention", is crucial.

Employment Consultants work hand in hand with the participants and the Local County Division of Family and Children to make sure that needed transitional services available can be accessed and used effectively by the participant. As well, Rauch, Inc. has collaborative and cooperative relationships with many other community agencies. These partnerships allow for the utilization of additional resources needed during the transitional period. Program flexibility and staff creativity are important throughout follow-along while the relationship between staff and participants continues to grow and change. During follow-along status, a participant's employment status may well change through job loss or the desire for a different position; in each case additional employment supports are provided. If the participant has already reached successful program closure status and a job change is needed, then the referral process from the county office is repeated in order for official placement activity to re-occur.

OUTCOMES

Rauch, Inc. is the contracted IMPACT employment service provider for Floyd and Clark Counties in southern Indiana. Rauch has held the Floyd County contract since July of 1997. In June of 1998 it was decided by the State to terminate all existing contracts. The Floyd County Division of Family and Children IMPACT Office requested that our contract remain open without initiating the re-bidding process.

We were 1 of 9, out of 129 contracts in the state, that were extended without change. Due to our successful outcomes for the Floyd County Project, we were asked to bid for the contract in neighboring Clark County. We were granted 50% of that county contract and began providing services to this additional county in October 1998.

The numbers shown in Figure 1 reflect the program statistics from 1997 to present. There were 670 referrals received with 298 active participants. There were 282 participants involved in the evaluation/assessments process with 136 completing. Job placement occurred for 257 participants with 97 reaching successful closure. There are 67 participants currently in follow-along status and 137 participants engaged in active job search. A participant who successfully completes all levels of his/her placement category is considered a successful program closure based on our contract's definitions. In the 1997-1998 contract year in Floyd County, all initial contract dollars were utilized, with an additional \$20,000 granted. Rauch also provided over \$50,000 free program services per contractual agreement. In the current contract year we have used all our allotted monies in Floyd County in the top two-placement/retention categories. On the average, our placements fall within the \$6.50 hourly range with the highest hourly wages between \$13.00 to \$15.00 an hour with benefits. Placement occurs in all occupational fields.

CONCLUSION

The expectations that are placed on individuals who are involved in welfare reform are what some people consider hard core and rigid. Often, participants are individuals who have not had many positive expectations in their life experience. The support of agencies such as Rauch, Inc. allow IMPACT participants the opportunity to meet those set expectations and develop their own plan of action for future goals. The use of evaluation/assessment in our Welfare-to Work program plan is crucial to the success of the participants and is quite unique to Rauch's approach. The formal and informal evaluation/assessment process allows us to glean valuable information concerning barriers to employment and life issues

participants are dealing with in everyday life. Personal life issues may include transportation, childcare, counseling, substance abuse, family relationships, and domestic violence. Supportive service needs are identified and recommendations are made for referral to other agencies and community resources. Collaboration and cooperation with other community based agencies, businesses, and providers are all crucial to the success of the program.

Taking personal responsibility for your own life is one of the several fundamental avenues explored through our program. Many participants enter placement programs with low self-esteem and negative expectations. They are not accustomed to selling themselves to others. At the beginning of the referral process, most participants are unable to identify a single strength that they possess. The evaluation/assessment process gives participants real and powerful knowledge of their strengths, abilities and renewed belief in their hopes and dreams for themselves and their families. Their confidence grows over time. Initially, participants may come to us to meet Impact requirements; however, those who remain active in the program discover that the support they receive contributes to their success. Many participants come at first feeling discouraged and down about their life situations. Soon they realize that we are not here to judge them; rather each individual is treated with respect and dignity. Participants are recognized for their personal strengths, skills, and abilities, their goals and dreams. Once participants realize that we, as providers, are interested in what they want and we are interested in supporting them in obtaining their set career goals, a truly unique relationship begins to develop. The participants begin to realize whom they are, where they are and where they want to be. Employment, whether full time or part time, high skilled or low skilled offers participants the dignity that no welfare check can (Jobs First, 1998). President Clinton stated our great social challenge will be "the dignity, the power, and the ethic of work, we are taking a historic chance to make welfare what it was meant to be: a second chance, not a way of life." (Gloster, 1998)

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Figure 1. Represented here are the program statistics from Rauch, Inc.'s Welfare-to-Work/Impact project.

Rauch Inc. Program Statistics

