

Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Webinar: Customized Employment: Opening Doors for People on the Autism Spectrum
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>> Cathy Pratt: I'd like to welcome everyone to the webinar that is hosted by the Autism Special Interest Group. My name is Dr. Cathy Pratt. For many years I've chaired. I'm thrilled to have two presenters, Brenda Clark and Tammy Jorgensen Smith speaking on "Customized Employment: Opening Doors for People on the Autism Spectrum."

Before they start, there's a few logistics that Sarah would like to share with you.

>> Sarah DeMaio: Thank you, Cathy. I'm Sarah DeMaio, Program Manager. As Cathy mentioned, before we begin we have a few logistics that I'd like to cover.

First of all, due to the number of people participating in today's webinar, all participant lines will be on mute. You can type questions at any time in the chat box, which is at the bottom of your screen.

At the end of today's presentation we will have a brief period for questions. In this period I will review any questions that have come in and then asked in the chat box, but participants can also raise their hand using the icon that's at the top of your screen. And those participants will be unmuted and be able to ask their question live.

Due to the number of participants and questions, we may not be able to have every question answered. We will do our best to follow up after the webinar with additional information as needed.

Finally, this webinar is being recorded. It will be archived. It will be available on AUD's website, aucd.org/resources/webinarlibrary.

I'd like to invite Brenda Clark and Tammy Jorgensen Smith to introduce themselves.

>> Brenda Clark: Thank you, Sarah. And thank all of you for joining us today. My name is Brenda Clark and I'm the Program Coordinator of Employment Supports And Services Area for the Florida Center for Inclusive Communities of Child and Family Studies in the College of Behavioral and Community Sciences, at the University of South Florida on the Tampa campus.

FCIC is a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities education research, and services. We have been established since October 2005 developing a range of supports and services in the area of employment, Interdisciplinary training, community supports, health, education and early childhood. If you will, please visit our website or contact me for additional employment information, materials, resources, and employment webinars focused on supporting persons with developmental disabilities to make informed choices and

decisions, and achieve full inclusion and participate in society, in an individualized manner, consistent with the unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, and capabilities of each individual.

Joining me today is my colleague Tammy.

Tammy?

>> Tammy Jorgensen Smith: Hello, Everyone. I am Tammy Jorgensen Smith. I am a tenured Associate Professor in the Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling Program at the University of South Florida and I also maintain a formal affiliation with the Florida Center for Inclusive Communities. My research focuses on the development and implementation of innovative, customized employment models to promote full inclusion and self-determination for people with complex disabilities.

Recently, my team and I were awarded a federal grant through the National Institute of Mental Health to test the feasibility, acceptability and preliminary efficacy of the customized employment process with adults who have autism. I'll share a little about that study in a few moments.

>> Brenda Clark: Thanks, Tammy.

The purpose and primary objectives of this presentation are: to increase participants' knowledge and understanding of the customized employment process; to share current efforts to develop an evidence-base for use of customized employment strategies to facilitate competitive, integrated employment for individuals with autism; and to demonstrate translation of research to practice and impact of utilizing customized employment strategies through the presentation of personal perspectives and success stories.

Tammy will provide an overview of the customized employment process and share information on the ACCESS study briefly mentioned during her intro. After the share of principles and key elements of Discovery and Customized Employment approach process, I will follow up to share the perspective of how Discovery and Customized Employment directly impacted an employer, an employee diagnosed with Autism, and you will hear from a business owner diagnosed with Autism and her parents about their journey through the Discovery and Customized Employment process to business in Florida.

>> Tammy Jorgensen Smith: Thank you, Brenda.

Let's begin by looking at the definition of customized employment as is written in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. WIOA defines customized employment as: "Competitive integrated employment for an individual with a significant disability that is based on an individualized determination of the strengths, needs, and interests of the individual with a significant disability, designed to meet the specific abilities of the individual with a significant disability and the business needs of the employer, and carried out through flexible strategies."

Key words in the definition include "individualized" - meaning one person and one job at a time and "flexible" - referring to the customization component of the process. It is also important to note that customized employment process seeks to identify a win-win outcome through careful matching of job seekers talents to the identified needs of an employer.

Customized employment strategies open doors for people who have not been successful in achieving competitive, integrated employment goals due to the complexity of their disability. It is not a new concept or process as these strategies have been demonstrated to be successful for decades. Like many innovative approaches, it takes time to get to the point of systems change. As for customized employment, that time has come and we now have the opportunity to utilize these strategies to assist people with complex disabilities, such as autism,

to become fully integrated into their communities and the workforce.

Customized employment strategies are helpful in many aspects of life, whether a person has a disability or not. Many people use career assessments and other methods to identify their career interests and talents. Most of us also use personal and professional connections to find jobs. When needed, we request flexible work schedules or modifications to accommodate further education, families or other commitments.

These same tasks often come much more easily for those of us who do not have challenges such as limited communication skills, cognitive processing issues, social-behavioral issues and comorbid conditions that add complexity to our lives. For example, people who have limited speech may not be able to respond quickly to assessment questions such as those in typical interviews. They may also have a difficult time expressing their interests and explaining their talents. Work environments are often not designed to be sensitive to sensory issues such as temperature intolerances, noise levels, and lighting. Many employers are not focused on unique interpersonal and learning styles not because they are not willing or able to be, but because they aren't aware of the need to be.

Customized employment strategies address all of these challenges and more. The customized employment process is grounded in social-ecological theory in that it acknowledges the complex interplay between a person and the environment. It emphasizes the importance of person-environment fit as well as the diverse systems that influence human functioning.

The customized employment process considers unique aspects of each person such as age, type of disability, functional capacities, disposition and interaction style. Customized employment also recognizes contextual factors including resources, living arrangements, geographical location, and services and supports that the person receives. Information gathered in the first phase of the customized employment process helps to facilitate an employment outcome that aligns with the individual's interests and talents while considering conditions that may impact successful, long-term employment. This information can also be utilized to customize and negotiate job accommodations and supports that address job retention concerns once a person is hired.

This figure illustrates the customized employment process. As you can see, the job seeker is at the center of the process and should always be involved in every aspect of his or her vocational rehabilitation. The customized employment process begins with Discovery and proceeds through the steps to employment and post-employment supports that facilitate job retention.

This is not a linear process. For instance, Discovery will continue to take place throughout the process and the vocational profile is ever evolving to reflect newly obtained skills, interest, and support needs. This table displays a brief description of each of the elements of the customized employment process.

Discovery is a type of naturalistic assessment that uses qualitative methods such as observation and interactions to gather information useful in the identification of ideal working conditions. Discovery provides information that is not always available through traditional vocational evaluations which are generally normed to a general population and do not take into consideration the special circumstances of complex disabilities. For example, a person with limited speech will likely have difficulty with vocational inventories and interviews. Discovery allows the evaluator the time and environment necessary to get to know the person and to see him or her at his or her best. This strategy facilitates a much deeper understanding of the

talents and support needs of the person which equates to better employment matches and greater retention of employment.

The vocational profile is the product of the Discovery process. It is a document that provides a robust, narrative snapshot of the job seeker based on the individual's strengths, interests, and ideal working conditions. Unlike traditional vocational evaluation reports, the information contained in a vocational profile is non-evaluative, does not contain scores, and does not compare the job seeker to a normative sample of the general population. The document is a tool that is utilized by the job seeker and his or her person-centered team to assist in the identification of feasible and appropriate employment matches that align with the person's interests, skills, and talents.

The customized planning meeting is team-based and involves the job seeker, family, friends, advocates, service and support providers, the VR counselor, and other relevant stakeholders. The purpose of the meeting is to bridge the gap between Discovery and employment. The product of the meeting is an action plan or "blueprint" that outlines the steps necessary for the job seeker to reach his or her employment goal. The blueprint contains the employment goal (or up to three prioritized employment options), the action steps to achieve the goal, the persons responsible for each action step, a timeframe for completing each step, and a status column to keep up with comments on progress, challenges, and other important information such as contacts and opportunities.

A career portfolio is a visual representation of abilities, skills, capabilities, knowledge, and qualities - it represents the job seeker's potential. The portfolio may contain certificates, awards, evidence of special training, performance reports, and letters of recommendation. It may also contain a visual resume that uses photos or video clips to present the job seeker to the employer and to demonstrate the job seeker completing tasks essential to the position.

The customized approach to job development involves identifying the unmet needs of employers. If a match between the job seeker's talents and the needs of the employer is identified, customization of the job begins. An essential element in customized employment is negotiating job duties and employer expectations to align the skills and interests of a job seeker to the needs of an employer.

It is very important to identify good employment matches; it is just as important to ensure that the employee is able to be successful at the job through the provision of accommodations and supports. Both employees and employers should be aware of the services available through the Job Accommodation Network (askjan.org) to aid in the identification and implementation of accommodations as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Post-employment supports have been proven to be beneficial for people with disabilities who may encounter issues that they are not prepared to handle without assistance. Opportunities for assistance should be provided in the development of natural supports and resources for targeting solutions to challenges prior to the loss of employment.

Understanding the universal hiring rule is the key to facilitating a customized employment match. One must demonstrate that the value of hiring the individual is greater than the cost the business will expend and makes good business sense. The employment specialist must identify a problem or an opportunity area within the business and the candidate must be the solution. Therefore, it is important to have tools (such as the vocational profiles obtained through Discovery) and processes in place that allow the person customizing the employment opportunity to get to know the job seeker well to understand the value they will

bring to the workforce.

Now, we will shift focus to a recently funded study that is being conducted to test the feasibility, acceptability and preliminary efficacy of the customized employment process in improving competitive employment outcomes for adults (age 22+) with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The name of the study is ACCESS which is an acronym for Achieving Competitive Customized Employment through Specialized Services.

The ACCESS model has potential to improve functional outcomes by improving both employment matching and employment customization for job seekers with autism.

As mentioned, the customized employment process has been around for some time and is considered a best practice in the field. The process has been found to be successful in improving employment outcomes through many demonstration projects over the years. However, the process has never been formally tested in a controlled study to allow for its establishment as an evidence-based practice. Also, it has never been studied for its impact on the target population of adults with autism.

The ACCESS study is being conducted in two phases. We are currently in phase one, the open trial, where we are testing the ACCESS intervention with a small group of participants. In this phase, we are determining the feasibility and acceptability of the model with all stakeholders including the job seekers, service providers, and vocational rehabilitation personnel and systems. We want to know if the intervention works well for everyone. After the open trial, we will incorporate stakeholder feedback and then conduct a randomized controlled trial to gain preliminary evidence of the effectiveness of the ACCESS intervention to facilitate competitive, integrated employment outcomes for participants.

An additional benefit of this study is that it has presented the opportunity to refine the customized employment documentation process by developing a user-friendly, streamlined package that promotes comprehensive and consistent application of the full customized employment process with fidelity to the tested model.

The primary goal of the ACCESS study is to gain convincing evidence of the feasibility, acceptability and preliminary efficacy of the ACCESS intervention in terms of facilitating competitive, integrated employment outcomes. However, we are taking this opportunity to examine the impact of the intervention on self-determination and quality of life of participants. We already have some evidence that the Discovery process increases self-determination, particularly in the domain of autonomy, through a prior study. Based on the philosophy and values associated with customized employment, we hypothesize that participation in the ACCESS study will create positive change in multiple areas of life for participants.

Data and findings from the current ACCESS study will be used to support a larger randomized controlled trial to generate statistical power to determine the size of the effect or impact. We will also be able to test the intervention with representative samples from under-represented groups.

This research study has the potential to dramatically shift current practice paradigms by informing research and policy decisions and by customizing employment placement strategies to address the specific support needs of adult job seekers with autism using the platform of an intervention already reimbursed by VR. Given early evidence regarding the promise of customized employment interventions, ACCESS has the potential to yield far-reaching benefits for this population and the stakeholders who support them.

As I wrap up my portion of the presentation, I would like to leave you with this quote

which is a reminder to always see a person for his or her value and potential contributions. Expectations can make the difference between success and failure. Here's a real life example.

One day, Thomas Edison came home and gave a paper to his mother. He told her, My teacher gave this paper to me and told me to only give it to my mother. His mother's eyes were tearful as she read the letter out loud to her child: Your son is a genius. This school is too small for him and doesn't have enough good teachers for training him. Please teach him yourself. Many years later, after Edison's mother passed away and he was now one of the greatest inventors of the century, he was looking through old family things. he saw a folded paper in the corner of a drawer in a desk. He took it and opened it up. On the paper was written: Your son is addled (which meant mentally ill). We won't let him come to school anymore. Edison cried for hours and then he wrote in his diary: "Thomas Alva Edison was an addled child that, by a hero mother, became the genius of the century."

I'm going to turn things back over to Brenda now so that she can share some personal perspectives and success stories that demonstrate the impact and utility of customized employment strategies in improving community and workforce integration for people who have autism.

Brenda?

It sounds like we're having trouble connecting with Brenda at the moment.

>> Brenda Clark: I'm here. I still had my phone on mute. I'm sorry.

Thanks, Tammy.

The emerging innovative trend of ACCESS findings is compelling work for systems change as a possible evidence-based practice and effectiveness with specific service needs of adult job seekers with autism. The following content was developed by Mrs. Yvonne Newson, the supervisor at Glazer Children's Museum, and Kenny, an adult employee with autism.

So the first video, please.

>> Good afternoon. My name's Christine. I'm the Chief Operating Officer. We have been working here with Kenny for a little over a year now. When he came to us for learning services, we were aware of the challenges that we were faced. We tackled them together. He was very open to everything that we were trying to train him on. We were job coached through the whole thing. There were a lot of things we needed to learn, too, about Kenny, about the way he works and how we could make him be the most successful. So we were glad to do that. And over a year later everybody works like a well-oiled machine over here. We're so glad to have him as part of the team.

>> Brenda Clark: Thank you.

Kenny was a referral from Christine at the Learning Academy Services which places candidates with autism spectrum disorders in permanent positions Christine served as Kenny's job coach and spent time with Kenny and museum staff to ensure our mutually successful working environment.

From the perspective of Yvonne, the supervisor in this situation, clearly understand by the statements on this slide that the approach of Customized Employment identified the conditions, interests, and talents of Kenny to attain competitive integrated employment.

Through the Customized Employment approach Yvonne was also supported with how to retain a dependable and reliable employee to get the job done. Getting the job done is the bottom line from a business interest when seeking to meet the needs of their operation. Isn't it interesting to note that she titled this slide "What We Both Needed" which further promotes the win-win outcome of Customized Employment presented by Tammy earlier today

during this webinar.

Yvonne was provided with tools and tips to best train Kenny and help him to learn and be successful in the position at the museum. And Christine continued to be available to them for reinforcement and continued training for both Kenny and museum staff.

What we learned -- Kenny became well versed in the needs and operations of the business. We learned tools and strategies to keep Kenny organized and to help him prioritize his workload. We received staff-wide training from the Center For Autism & Related Disabilities at USF. And getting to know Kenny and being able to utilize training helped everyone reach their goals and meet expectations.

Yvonne shared in plain everyday language through the statements on this slide that the customized employment approach is grounded in social-ecological theory. Yvonne recognizes the significance in acknowledging the complex interplay between Kenny and the workplace to ensure as an employee he is at his best functioning and demonstrating expected behavior consistent with his role and responsibilities on the job.

Kenny's expectations, how he works best -- Kenny keeps predictable schedule and workload. Kenny is provided a weekly task list by e-mail, giving him the tasks to be done each day he works. Kenny is provided a laminated checklist on a clipboard. Kenny marks off tasks on the laminated sheet as he takes care of them. And Kenny excels at inventory and takes great pride in his work.

What is most interesting about these accommodations, like most accommodations, they became a universal tool at his workplace. Kenny informed that one day he arrived at work looking for his clipboard with the laminated checklist and was unable to find it. Later it was discovered that another employee had taken the clipboard with the laminated checklist to guide her work. Yvonne and Kenny both laughed as they share more of this story because the clipboard with the laminated checklist is now used for all new employees as they are hired to guide their work.

During the customized employment approach one of the key steps is accommodations and post-employment supports. It is through this process the clipboard with the laminated checklist was designed. As a result, this tool is now used to further enhance the workplace output of all employees to ensure every expected responsibility is completed. However, Kenny notes that since his year, now almost two years, he uses the clipboard occasionally.

Final thoughts: Yvonne needed to educate herself and really get to know Kenny to learn how to best communicate and train him. New tasks are sometimes intimidating for Kenny and knowing him on a personal level helps Yvonne approach subjects and new training opportunities.

Customized employment works. Kenny, Yvonne, and the Museum co-workers use radio communication system. Support to and from Kenny is routinely provided throughout the given work day.

As shared by Tammy, post-employment supports have been proven to be beneficial for people with disabilities who may encounter issues that they are not prepared to handle without assistance. Opportunities for assistance should be provided in the development of natural supports and resources for targeting solutions. Kenny helps to train new staff on areas where he had mastered while he is also receives help from his supervisor and his co-workers on areas where new responsibilities are being added.

Thanks, Kenny and Yvonne, for sharing a portion of your customized employment

and Discovery journey with us today.

The discovery and customized employment process is also an approach to support business ownership possibilities such as a micro-enterprise. A micro-enterprise is a small business with minimal employees and small amount of capital or start-up to bring revenue to the business. Micro-enterprises have long since been an opportunity for people to use their talents, skills, and abilities to demonstrate and establish their value as a viable business owner to create economically useful work through the discovery and customized only approach, Chelsea and her team learned that a micro-enterprise platform may be the opportunity for Chelsea to use her talents, skills, and abilities to contribute to the development of her journey, creating her own economically useful work.

In this brief video, you will hear from Chelsea and her parents, share their perspective and experience with the discovery and customized employment process. Throughout the recording you will hear them share in everyday language the implementation of the six key elements of customized employment process: first, the identification of ideal working conditions; second, align with the job seekers interests skills and talents; three, team-based action planning; four, marketing and promoting the job seeker's abilities; five, leveraging the value of the job seeker's contributions; and, six, ongoing support through social capital, typical resources, and other natural support networks.

Meet Chelsea and her parents.

>> Probably won't know a lot of information around moves around a lot. But we won't find out information which might [Inaudible]

[Video inaudible]

[CART/Captions Standing By]

>> Looks like we're having a little trouble with this video so I'm going to try downloading and it and reloading it for us to view in a moment.

Brenda, if you want to give us some thoughts or ideas on what look for that would be great.

>> Brenda Clark: Yes, in the video you would hear Chelsea's mom talk about her perspective, the things that she experienced when she first went to vocational rehabilitation. And you will hear her father talk about his role. Both are now employees of the micro-enterprise.

And in this photo that you see on the slide is Chelsea. She's wearing the t-shirt that she has designed. There are several different ones that she has designed as well as greeting cards and other types of sayings. When she took this particular photo, her mom shared with me that they had never been able to have Chelsea take a professional photo at all. Because this was for her business, she felt like, as Tammy mentioned earlier, self-determination, self-motivation and those kinds of things, how well she sat in order to have these professional photos taken for her business. It was very different than any other time in her entire life to try to get her to take a photo.

Are you ready to show it now?

>> Tammy Jorgensen Smith: I think we're ready to try again.

>> Brenda Clark: Ok. Thank you.

>> Information from it.

[Video inaudible]

They are much like Chelsea. They are all affected in their own way. One is a clinical social worker. One is a 747 [Inaudible]. The difference being [Inaudible].

Chelsea being non-verbal has more difficulty and needs much greater [Inaudible] to

access [Inaudible]. She's worked hard at it. [Inaudible] but we need more of that.

Now it's been actually wonderful in getting the support that we need to continue because it's an ongoing process. We need more people like her. Because I will tell you that we went through a lot of VR counselors before we found her. And not all of them thought outside the box. A lot of them came in [Inaudible]. We got many [Inaudible]. Chelsea [Inaudible], she has potential, she is a creative mind. [Inaudible] a beautiful person.

You have to look at when you assess anybody, anything whether it's academic [Inaudible]. What are ways to modify it, to adapt it, to get the most response? And especially if they don't have language. [Inaudible]

Look at every person you see and think, you know, how can I make something possible for this person, this young adult. Not do they fit into my box. What box can I help put around them. Not do they fit in mine. It's not your box or [Inaudible]'s box. Make a box around them and have habits for them.

>> So we started early with Voc Rehab, approached meetings. We had [Inaudible] involved, [Inaudible]

>> [Inaudible] was working on --

>> [Inaudible] her mother and I have pretty much done [Inaudible] we do ourselves.

[Inaudible] it was pretty cool that we had nothing to do with [Inaudible], absolutely [Inaudible].

>> I. W-i-l-l, will, f-i-n-d, find, S-u-c- [Inaudible] success. I own. I know. Own what?

[Inaudible] you will find success in your own vision. You did well.

>> Brenda Clark: So at the end, throughout the video where the parents were talking about even though a person is unable to use oral language or has the comorbid challenges, that it is our role in supporting people and to get to know them where they are at their best and look at what those conditions are and find their talents. They had no idea that Chelsea had such a great sense of humor and had all of these sayings running around in her head and was just so creative.

And through the discovery and customized process -- it was a long journey. This is not something that just happens overnight. The observations, the spending time with people, the more people that are involved, the more different ideas, getting to know folks. But what it has done for Chelsea is provided her the opportunity to develop more social capital, to enhance relationships with people other than her family and paid support. Because they have gone to different workshops they've gone to conferences, to different areas where people who have micro-enterprises bring their goods to sell.

And she is always there. She is always a part of that. But her parents take care of the financialties no different than large businesses who have their financial people and have their inventory people and other different roles to handle those other kinds of activities within the business. But it's for the creative mind and the creativity of what goes on the shirts, what goes on the cards and other items, her sayings, all of that comes from Chelsea. And they never would have known this had they not gone through the discovery process and customized employment to set up this micro-enterprise to support Chelsea.

Tammy?

>> Tammy Jorgensen Smith: Thanks, Brenda.

At this point in time we will open the floor for questions, any questions that you have about anything that we've presented or anything about customized employment. We're happy to help.

>> Thanks, Tammy and Brenda. It looks like we have one person with their hand raised,

Katherine. I'm going to enable their microphone to allow them to ask the question.

Anyone who doesn't want to use their microphone can certainly type a question into the chat box.

I'm not hearing a question. Katherine, I have enabled your microphone if you want to ask the question. You may need to engage it yourself using a button at the top of your screen.

I also see a hand raised by Lisa Navarra. I will also open up her microphone.

Katherine asks: Can you review the six steps of customized employment process?

>> Tammy Jorgensen Smith: Sure. The first step is the discovery process, which is the time that you spend with the individual and the people who know that person best in order to get to know that person's interests, talents, and conditions for employment. It's the time you spend in natural surroundings doing things like familiar activities with the person. It doesn't involve any type of standardized assessment or controlled settings. It's just spending time with the person and paying attention to what they do, what they are interested in, what their talents are through that time spent with them.

The second step is the development of the vocational profile which is the product of discovery. It's basically -- the vocational profile has three parts. It has a demographic section. And then part two is descriptive writing of all the different things that were observed, interview information, observations, interactions, and narrative format. And the third section is translating that information into potential employment opportunities. So looking through that information and identifying areas of interests, talents, different conditions, and translating those to potential employment that is feasible within the person's -- for instance, one of the things that you do is you look at what's around in the neighborhood. You look at transportation options. That helps you identify the feasible employment options in the area.

After the discovery process is completed and the vocational profile is written, the person-centered team comes together, along with any relevant stakeholders but always, always the job seeker -- nothing is done without the job seeker in customized employment -- to look at what is in that profile and develop an action plan or blueprint that helps the individual get from what is learned to an actual job that's competitive, integrated environment. Customized employment never looks at anything other than competitive, integrated employment. As is required by the Workforce Innovations and Opportunities Act, but also part of the philosophy of customized employment.

Once that plan is developed, the marketing tools are made. And this can be done at any point after discovery to help market the person. A lot of times if a person is not verbal and cannot respond to interview questions, as somebody who is verbal, a visual resume can show them doing the essential functions of the job through photos and videos so that they can demonstrate that to the employer, even if they can't verbalize that.

The job development negotiation is a more complex step in the fact that first you, as an employment specialist, would go to different employers that have been identified through this discovery and planning process. You start off with just doing -- asking for about 20 minutes of the employer's time. Just ask them questions about their business. Maybe have them give you a tour of the business so you can be looking for areas of need within that business. For instance, individuals who are being underutilized, like, for instance, entering information into the computer when they are talented sales people, or just notice where a person -- where the talents of the job seeker could really be beneficial to the employer.

Pretty much anybody is hiring if there is a need identified. And that need could be met. So you get to know the business and then move on to the job development where you

work with the employer to customize a job position.

I'll give you a quick example of what that could look like. There's a young man we were working with who was very interested -- through the discovery process we realized that he was very interested in video games. He was very organized. He had great data entry skills. And he spent a lot of his time at the local Game Stop just looking at the different games. And while he was there a lot of times he would organize the store and everybody in that Game Stop knew him because he would come in on a regular basis. And he felt comfortable there.

Well, we talked to the employees and to the business owner and found out that the employees really felt like their favorite part of the job was being able to demonstrate the games and talk about the games and sell the games. One of the needs that were identified is that the way Game Stop works is they have new inventory and they also buy back games from people. So people would ask for a game. And sometimes they had bought a game and it was on the shelf but hadn't been put into the computer or back out on to the floor. Or they would have it in the computer but go to the floor and it had been misplaced and nobody could find it. So they were losing sales because of that.

Well, when this young man came in and started working, a job was customized for him, he would come in and enter the inventory, both new and used inventory, into the computer, put the stickers on it, and get it out on the shelves. And he was very good at organizing and making sure that the whole store, every video, was in alphabetical order, in the right section. And then the other people in the store were able to spend more time, more of their time, selling.

So between that business becoming an autism-friendly business, the Center For Autism and Related Disabilities will provide a sticker that says autism-friendly business. And between that and the neatness of the store and the increased time in being able to focus on sales and the fact that they could find video, and they were in the system as quickly as possible, increased the sales for that store.

So that's an example of how you can customize a job to be able to benefit the employee and the employer. And, of course, the post-employment supports and accommodations are always essential. It's really important that these include making sure that the supervisors and the co-workers are all trained and understand how to work best with the individuals.

So hopefully that more than answers the question. Let's open it back up to make sure that that was addressed or if there are any other questions.

>> There was another question about wanting more details about micro-enterprise and whether that is operationalized through the regional center, your VR agents, both, or some other mechanism.

>> Tammy Jorgensen Smith: Brenda, do you want to take that one?

>> Brenda Clark: Sure. The micro-enterprise that Chelsea is involved with, she receives support through Vocational Rehabilitation? Is that the question?

>> Yes. The question is how does this get operationalized. Where is the funding?

>> Brenda Clark: The Vocational Rehabilitation. What we do here in Florida is called a Consultant for Business Ownership. So they have folks who have been trained to help individuals use discovery and figure out the development of a business plan. And then when they develop this business plan and the feasibility of it for three to five-year duration, they take that to and present it to their vocational rehabilitation and they review it to determine with what is written there as far as the financials and that sort of thing. If it is a viable plan, and once it's

determined by Vocational Rehabilitation that it is a viable plan, then the start-up that they may be requesting is provided by Vocational Rehabilitation. And they continue to receive employment supports if that's something that is included in the business plan development.

Does that answer your question?

>> The next question is from Justin asking whether you can talk about the discovery portion of a customized employment and specifically what does the structure of the meeting look like. Is it 20 hours a month? Is it weekly visits? It appears more intensive than a situational assessment where you may only see someone as they complete [Inaudible] potential job and determine skills and abilities and then move on.

>> Tammy Jorgensen Smith: It's definitely more intensive than a situational assessment. The discovery process typically takes -- it's different depending upon how complex the individual's disability is, scheduling and multiple other factors. But typically about 20 hours is spent with the individual in discovery activities.

There are multiple different things that are included. One of the things that is done towards the beginning is at least one if not multiple, visits to the individual's home. You can learn a lot by going to a person's home. You learn if they live in a rural or urban setting, on public transportation, you know, who they live with, what types of supports they have available. You can look and see -- you can learn interests and talents just by looking around a person's house.

For instance, the young man I talked about, we could tell from his room that he was an extremely organized person. We could tell that he was interested in video games by the stacks of video games he had and the different gaming systems he had.

So you start in the home. You look in the neighborhood and the surrounding areas for what businesses might be close by. You talk with the people who live with the person, the family members, the friends, the support personnel. You do conversational interviews. Of course the first person you want to do a conversational interview with is the individual but contingent upon their level of speech, you can learn a lot directly from the person, through observations. If they cannot verbalize answers to the questions, just the more interaction you have with that person, the more you get to learn about that person.

The other things that you would do is go to familiar activities with a person. See what they do in familiar activities. You can learn how they interact with other people when they feel comfortable. You may identify some additional interests and talents by doing so.

You would also want to spend time with them, with the individual, in novel activities or new activities. This will give you great insight as to how they may act and interact when they go for a job interview or when they start a job for the first time. They may need more time to get used to the environment. There may be things about the environment that you need to know that could be modified to help the individual. Like, for instance, lighting. If the person doesn't do well with lights that flicker, then maybe that could be fixed ahead of time so that there aren't issues with it.

So you're spending a lot of time with the person. Like I said, an average of about 20 hours over the course of several weeks. Sometimes discovery can be completed in less time but that's an average. Sometimes it takes much longer. Like Brenda said, with Chelsea it took a little bit more time due to the complexities of her disability and co-occurring conditions that had to be considered.

>> Sarah DeMaio: Thank you for that. Tammy.

And thank you all, to the presenters, very much. Thank you for sharing your

expertise and your time. Thank you to Cathy Pratt for joining us and encouraging people to join us for other webinars.

I would also like to encourage people if you're interested in other webinars similar to this one to go to the AUCD website and sign up.

We are now at 3:00. I'd like to remind everyone that this webinar will be archived and available on the AUCD webinar archives. I would encourage everyone to complete the survey at the end of today's webinar. Your feedback will help us improve webinars in the future as we continue to provide quality programming for AUCD and the broader disability community.

Thank you very much and have a great rest of your afternoon.

>> Brenda Clark: Thank you. And I provided the response for the business plan question that was asked. I typed it into the chat box.

>> Sarah DeMaio: Yes. Thank you.

>> Tammy Jorgensen Smith: And contact information. Our contact information is on the screen if you need to reach us to have additional questions or resources provided.

Thank you so much.

>> Brenda Clark: Thank you for having us. Bye-bye.

>> Sarah DeMaio: Thank you.