

# Belonging Matters' Podcast

## Transcript

Series 2 Episode 1: Overview of Customised Employment

Michael Callahan

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Welcome to Belonging Matters Podcast, Series Two, Employment. Also available on Apple podcasts, Google podcasts, Spotify, and [www.belongingmatters.org](http://www.belongingmatters.org). You can email Belonging Matters on [info@belongingmatters.org](mailto:info@belongingmatters.org), and please, subscribe and share. Series Two, Episode One, "Overview of Customised Employment". Michael Callahan has consulted throughout the US, Canada and Europe in the area of employment and transition for the past forty years. He has worked with Marc Gold & Associates (MG&A) for forty-three years, and has served as president of the organisation since

Marc Gold's death in 1982. MG&A is a network of consultants that provides technical assistance to systems, agencies and families interested in ensuring the complete community participation of persons with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities. In 2000, Michael joined three other colleagues to form a non-profit organisation, Employment for All. Michael's current work focuses primarily on Customised Employment, Discovery and Systematic Instruction/Job Coaching for adults and youth with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities.

In this podcast, Michael and Norciva Schupert who joined MG&A in 1993, give an overview of Customised Employment. It was first published as an article by Belonging Matters in their periodical, issue 29, 'Thinking About...Employment.' This episode of the Belonging Matters' Podcast is narrated by professional voice artist Brett Carrol.

Customized Employment is a strategy that provides persons with life complexities, and indeed other applicants with significant barriers to employment, with an alternative to traditional, competitive jobs. According to a new definition used by the US Department of Labor, Customized Employment refers to:

*“Individualizing the employment relationship between employees and employers in a way that meet the needs of both. It is based on an individualized determination of the strengths, needs and interests of the person with a disability and is also designed to meet the specific needs of the employer. (Federal Register, June 26, 2002, Vol. 67. No. 123 pp 43154-43149)”*

Customized Employment relies on a negotiated rather than competitive approach to employers; therefore, job developers must be available to assist applicants to develop personalized proposals for employers. This approach to employment offers the promise of welcoming all persons with life complexities who wish to work into the generic employment system and into a job that fits their needs. It also defines the critical role of employment related services to support both the individual with a disability and the generic system to make employment a viable option for persons once thought to be unemployable.

## **1. Discovery**

The discovery strategy uses discovery as a substitute to comparison-based testing procedures in that it utilizes already existing information rather than information developed through formal assessment methods. Discovery is used as a guide for customizing an employment relationship for an applicant with an employer. This process takes into account the applicant's entire life experiences rather than single instances of performance.

The discovery process begins with a provider representative who meets with the applicant and family at the home of the applicant. These visits, along with other discovery activities, give the individual and family, as appropriate, information about their powerful roles in the process and allow the provider to compile basic information that is necessary to begin the process.

The provider then schedules time to spend with the applicant during the activities that comprise the majority of typical days, as well as accompanying the applicant during planned community activities. This interaction allows the provider to get to know the applicant and to assist in identifying personalized preferences and conditions for employment as well as individual contributions to be offered to employers.

## **2. The Narrative or Visual Profile Document: Capturing the Information of discovery**

This process uses a comprehensive format that describes the individual in a narrative manner. For students, this document becomes a work in progress during the transition years of the student's school career passed on from teacher to teacher until graduation. The document is then passed on to adult employment service personnel to be used as a basis for job development and support, as appropriate. For adults, the descriptive document provides information vital to planning and can substitute for traditional, comparative vocational assessment procedures. In addition to sample profile formats for a written narrative, alternative format for capturing discovered information will be offered.

## **3. The Customized Planning Meeting: Developing the employment plan**

A Customized Planning Meeting is held with the applicant, family, friends, advocates, the provider, agency representative, VR counsellors and others chosen by the applicant. This planning meeting adheres to the values associated with the best of person-directed and person-centered values. The applicant (with support from family or others, as necessary) holds "trumps" during the meeting and decides the information

that will be included in the plan. The meeting describes a customized job development plan in the form of a blueprint that includes: Generally speaking, “what works and what doesn’t work” for the applicant; the applicant’s preferences, contributions, and conditions for employment; the types of job tasks the applicant feels should comprise the job; specific employment sites where work could be developed for the applicant; and employment leads and relationships with possible employers.

#### **4. Development of a Representational Portfolio**

The customized process also utilizes a “presentation portfolio” as a tool for job developers to use to introduce both the general idea of persons with significant life complexities making contributions to employers and as a personalized, visual resume that represents the best of the applicant.

The portfolio is a customized visual presentation on behalf of a person that will assist either the job developer or the person themselves, as they speak with employers. The portfolio was test marketed with employers throughout the country and found to be of significant benefit in explaining the unique contributions of applicants.

This new product has been used by people with severe and multiple life complexities, including physical and communication life complexities, and their representatives, as appropriate, in order to assist such individuals in securing employment.

## **5. Customized Job Development**

While the Customized Planning Meeting clarifies the applicant's preferences and conditions of employment and specific employment leads, it does not provide the applicant a job. Job finding efforts are initiated based on the "blueprint" developed during the Customized Planning Meeting. It is essential to discover any of the applicant's relationships or their support circle's relationships with targeted employers. This helps to make initial contacts with prospective employers. In most cases, conventional job descriptions will not be appropriate for an applicant with significant life complexities. Therefore, the provider must look beyond job openings, to identifying the unmet needs of an employer. Armed with the knowledge about the applicant, the provider can then look for job tasks and work cultures that fulfil the applicant's criteria for a successful job match. Tours of specific employment sites are used to identify the unmet needs of an employer by looking at job tasks, employee routines, and worksite cultures.

Jobs are developed when an employer needs the tasks offered by the applicant and negotiation occurs to address the applicant's conditions. The "blueprint" match and the negotiation paired with the employer's unmet need, is a win, win for everyone!

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