

East Bay Innovations (EBI) Final Project Report: Let's Go to Work

Goal

The goal of EBI's Employment Services is to create access to gainful employment for individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities and to provide support to individuals, once on-the-job, so that they can be successful in the workplace. EBI researches the workforce needs of various untapped employment sectors; networks widely with prospective employers; creates pipelines to industries and opportunities for skill development through training programs, such as Project SEARCH; conducts intensive job development, and provides on-the-job coaching once an individual is in the workplace. EBI provides support to more than 125 individuals on-the-job and during the job development phase.

We consider the growing number of people who are employed, rate of pay, retention rates, job satisfaction, and increasing entrée to new employers, to be key accomplishments. The increased independence and reported wellbeing of the individuals we work with, while less quantifiable, is a dramatic reflection of success.

Recently, EBI provided testimony to legislators outlining obstacles to employment and seeking funding for job development. We consider the passage of SB 577 a great accomplishment with promising outcomes.

Summary of Participants

The participants listed in the attached Excel spreadsheet are a subset of the clients served in EBI's supported employment program, and are those individuals served through EBI's Employment Services who were placed in jobs or were engaged in job development from April 1, 2014 through September 30, 2014. As indicated, they are typically 18 and older, may or may not have had previous job experience, reflect diverse ethnicities, and are clients of the regional center and/or DOR. Most participants have autism, Down syndrome and/or intellectual disabilities.

The types of support EBI provides to participants includes, but is not limited to, assistance defining job/career goals; identifying and/or developing training opportunities; accessing prospective employers; assisting in resume preparation, completing applications, and preparing for interviews; reviewing and helping to manage public benefits; and, on-the-job coaching, as needed. EBI usually provides a Job Coach 100% of the time, initially, with job coaching fading to 20% within a number of months. Services are individualized, as much as possible to ensure that the employee learns the job duties, understands the culture of the workplace, receives the accommodations

needed to increase the likelihood of success, and ultimately has opportunities for increased responsibility and career growth within the workplace.

Partners

EBI partners with a number of advocacy organizations, educational institutions, and agencies including, but not limited to: Department of Rehabilitation, Alameda County Developmental Disabilities Planning and Advisory Council, One Stop Career Centers, Alameda County Health Care Services Agency, Area Board 5, Oakland Unified School District, Oakland Adult School, Regional Center of the East Bay, and the World Institute on Disabilities. UCSF Benioff Children's Hospital Oakland and the County of Alameda are Project SEARCH replication sites; another version of an internship program is now hosted at Berkeley Lawrence National Laboratory. All of these training programs have led to gainful employment for a number of participants both at their sites and with other local employers.

Employers

15 job placements were made between April 1, 2014 through September 30, 2014 with the following employers: Sugar Foods, Ed Roberts Campus, Sports Authority, Safeway, Home Depot, Alameda County District Attorney's Office, Costco, Health Partnership Project, Goodwill Industries, Sprouts, and Fremont Bank. Clients were placed in manufacturing, non-profit, retail, grocery, education, health, legal, and banking sectors.

Promotion of Supported Employment

EBI makes presentations about supported employment on an ongoing basis: at school districts and local transition-age classes with students and their parents; through our Ramping Up for Independence evening training series for parents and young adults; to prospective employers, human service managers and hiring personnel; at transition fairs, young adult programs, Special Education fairs, and, to Department of Rehabilitation staff. EBI was instrumental in developing the Alameda County Community Conversation, inviting multiple employers and meeting, on September 4, 2014, with more than 25 employers of various sectors to begin the "conversation." Outreach by EBI to individuals with the capacity to influence hiring processes and/or decisions have led to greater employment opportunities, but the process is slow and requires a multiple meetings and trainings with prospective employers and hiring managers. EBI is hopeful that momentum among the employers present at the Community Conversation will yield expanded hiring opportunities for individuals with developmental disabilities.

Four videos, developed through the Tarjan-funded project, have been circulating widely on social media and have been disseminated to targeted employers, as well. Most recently, "Supported Employment: The Valued Role of Employees with Disabilities,"

was shown at the Alameda County Community Conversation. Following that event, requests were made to EBI to share the video. The fifth and final video, “Supported Employment: Raising the Employment Bar,” has just been completed and will also be widely disseminated. EBI’s primary audience for its first four videos are prospective employers, agencies interested in developing a supported employment service, or agencies with supported employment services that have stalled or failed. Secondary audiences are largely families, educators, and human services personnel. For the last video, “Supported Employment: Raising the Employment Bar,” the target audience is agencies interested in developing/strengthening a supported employment program. The secondary audience is employers.

Barriers

The greatest difficulty continues to be the lack of funding available for “job development” with prospective employers. Given the length of time it takes to create pipelines to untapped employment sectors, and to meet with employers unfamiliar with the concept and benefits of supported employment, together with inadequate reimbursement for job development (the placements and retention) from the Department of Rehabilitation, EBI finds it necessary to spend a significant amount of time identifying resources that can help fund critically needed job development.

And while EBI’s job placement and retention rates for Project SEARCH graduates are high, there are substantial barriers to employment, despite the intensive training they’ve completed. The process of gaining access to and then engaging new employers in a conversation requires considerable perseverance, creativity, and a large commitment of time. With time and experience, however, job developers can address misperceptions and suggest alternatives to obstacles commonly raised by employers.

Discussions about alternatives to interviews, trial work periods, and the on-the-job training provided by an EBI job coach at no cost to them can be reassuring to a hesitant employer. But without adequate funding for job development, the ability to reach and cultivate relationships with prospective employers and satisfactorily address their concerns is limited. Unfortunately, the lack of funding for job development has been a barrier to employment for many years.

The most recently developed video address the multiple obstacles facing providers and provides strategies with which to address them.

Lessons Learned

Over time, EBI has learned strategies to address obstacles including, but not limited to: how to identify employment sectors with the likelihood of having stable, entry level jobs; how to provide training to individuals so that they have the skill sets needed in sectors with hiring opportunities; how to access employers in the local community that represent

these sectors; how to get through the door to hiring decision-makers; how to encourage an employer to allow a “working interview” instead of a traditional interview; and, how to braid funding sources to allow for the personnel needed to implement a successful supported employment program.

Success Story

When B. graduated from EBI’s first Project SEARCH job training class hosted by the County of Alameda, she was ready to go to work. Prepared, motivated, determined. *But it took three years after completing Project SEARCH to secure full-time employment.* Today she is gainfully employed in Alameda County District Attorney Nancy O’Malley’s office. She arrives at work and prepares a detailed “trial sheet” for the criminal and civil court cases being heard that day. She responds to questions at the front counter of the Alameda County District Attorney’s office, handles interoffice mail, and answers phones. And she has successfully completed her six month probation period. With the support of a Job Coach, B’s successfully handling increasing responsibility on-the-job. She’s extremely hard-working, dedicated to her job, and is embracing its challenges with growing confidence.

Products

Links to all five videos, both captioned and not, have already been sent to Tarjan staff associated with the Let’s Go to Work program. Please contact Linda Ratner, lratner@eastbayinnovations.org if there are questions about accessing the videos.