

# workforce *Development*

a quarterly publication of the Maryland Customized Employment Partnership

2004 – Volume 01 Issue 01



**WELCOME** to the first issue of *Workforce Development*. This publication will be issued quarterly for the next five years in order to present updates, findings, and implications of the Maryland Customized Employment Partnership (MCEP). The goal is to regularly feature information relevant to practitioners, funders, policy makers, advocates, and workforce development personnel.

*Workforce Development* will also feature examples of customized employment in action from the perspectives of individual job seekers, MCEP partners, employers, One Stop personnel, and others involved and interested in effective employment service delivery to people with disabilities and other customers with significant barriers to employment in Maryland's One Stop system.

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### DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

It is with great enthusiasm that the Montgomery County (MD) Workforce Investment Board, in partnership with the Division of Workforce Investment Services, announces the addition of customized employment services for people with disabilities to the One Stop service delivery system. With funding provided by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, the Maryland Customized Employment Partnership will demonstrate how the workforce development system can better serve persons with significant disabilities; individuals who typically are not regularly targeted for services by the One Stop Center system. In partnership with public and private entities, we look forward to building the capacity in Montgomery County's local One-Stop Centers to provide customized employment services to individuals with significant barriers to employment. MCEP services will also provide a vehicle for our Local Board to systemically review our policies and practices in terms of service to persons with disabilities, and to incorporate new and innovative practices, as appropriate.

The WIB encourages local service providers to participate or partner with us on this exciting project for people with disabilities in Montgomery County.



Eric Seleznow,  
Director, Workforce Investment Services

# Universal Employment Access

## *Pipedream or Possibility?*



First, the good news: the fields of special education, vocational rehabilitation, and disability employment services continue to make advances that result in good jobs for individuals requiring significant support in order to get and keep these jobs. Among these advances is the expansion of effective employment alternatives, including supported employment, self-employment, supported entrepreneurship, job carving and restructuring, and the use of personal agents, individual vouchers, training accounts, and personal budgets.

The bad news, unfortunately, is that widespread adoption of these methods has been slow at best. Consequently, the employment rates for people with significant disabilities remain very disappointing, as low as 8% in some studies. Quite simply, employment outcomes for people with significant disabilities have not lived up to the promise of evolving employment service methodology. Nor have employment outcomes lived up to the expectations of past legislation designed in part to address this situation, including the Rehabilitation Act, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Americans with Disabilities Act and others.

This seems like a contradiction: the existence of effective employment service practices but overall disappointing employment outcomes. Employment of far too many individ-

uals with significant disabilities often seems much like a pipedream. Can this be changed?

### **Creating New Possibilities through Customized Employment**

There are many who believe that this circumstance is more the result of systemic challenges and service availability rather than the result of persons with significant disabilities being

*Customized Employment capitalizes on individualized determination of the strengths, needs, and interests of persons with significant disabilities, and assumes the provision of negotiated accommodations and the development of supports necessary for the individual to perform the functions of a chosen job.*

unemployable. Consequently, several important recent legislative and policy developments have been designed to address these challenges. Prominent among these is the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 which includes provisions for people with disabilities to obtain universal access to workforce development services that are offered to the general public.

WIA, and the One Stop Career Centers it funds to deliver workforce development services, potentially opens new avenues for employment development and support for people with disabilities who need significant support to get and keep jobs. The promise of WIA for universal access is further enhanced by the recent funding by the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), U.S. Department of Labor, of planning and demonstration models on employment services delivered through WIA-funded One-Stop Career Centers, for people with significant disabilities.

These models are implementing service and funding approaches, with One Stop Career Centers as the focal point, that blend the resources of multiple partners so that people achieve jobs that are “customized.” That is, jobs based on individualizing the employment relationship between a job seeker with a disability and an employer to meet the needs of both.

### **The Basics of Customized Employment**

Customized employment, by definition, cannot be delivered through a standardized, cookie cutter approach. It represents a direction in employment services practice that (1) capitalizes on individualized determination of the strengths, needs, and interests of persons with significant disabilities, and (2) assumes the provision of



negotiated accommodations and the development of supports necessary for the individual to perform the functions of a chosen job.

Such customized jobs are designed so that specific tasks are assigned that typically have not previously existed in a formal or single job description in the company. But such tasks are necessary to the effective operation of an employer's enterprise. These tasks are also assigned based on the individual characteristics of the employee, including the need for specific accommodations. Both the tasks and the accommodations are negotiated with the employer based on meeting particular employer needs that are addressed by the arrangement.

One example of a customized job is when an employee, who desires to work in an office and who has basic filing skills but cannot use a keyboard, is hired to do specific filing and copying tasks that ordinarily an administrative staff member would perform. "Carving" out these tasks for the employee with a disability allows the other staff members to get more done by focusing on broader tasks. The number of hours worked, the method of teaching the employee the job, and other potential accommodations may be negotiated with the employer based on both the employee's and the employer's circumstances.

### Collaboration for better results

Often, however, to make such customized jobs happen, collaboration is necessary between the individual job seeker, disability employment service providers, funders, and ancillary services such as transportation, SSI benefits managers, and mental health programs. Customized employment is therefore not a single service, but a blend of services designed to increase employment options for individuals with significant disabilities.

At the local level this means that resources may be pooled in new and creative ways so that entities that have not previously worked together can help each other meet their goals and help people with disabilities

*Customized Employment is a blend of services designed to increase employment options for individuals with significant disabilities.*

achieve paid, integrated jobs with benefits and opportunities for career advancement. The WIA funded One Stop Career Centers are logical focal points for this collaboration since they have been established to convene employment service partners in a common locale for the convenience of job seekers.

### The Maryland CE Partnership

The Maryland Customized Employment Partnership (MCEP), formed earlier this year in Montgomery County, features the collaboration of various entities that:

- Oversee the public workforce investment system;
- Fund employment services for people with disabilities, such as vocational rehabilitation and developmental disabilities agencies;
- Have expertise in disability employment service delivery, such as supported employment service providers and consultants;
- Provide advocacy on behalf of people with disabilities, such as Centers for Independent Living; and
- Operate WIA-funded workforce development training programs, in this case Montgomery Works, the local One-Stop Center in Montgomery County.

MCEP has three primary purposes:

1. to expand the capacity of One-Stop Centers to serve people with disabilities, particularly those who have significant support needs,
2. to leverage and align resources from currently disparate workforce and human service systems

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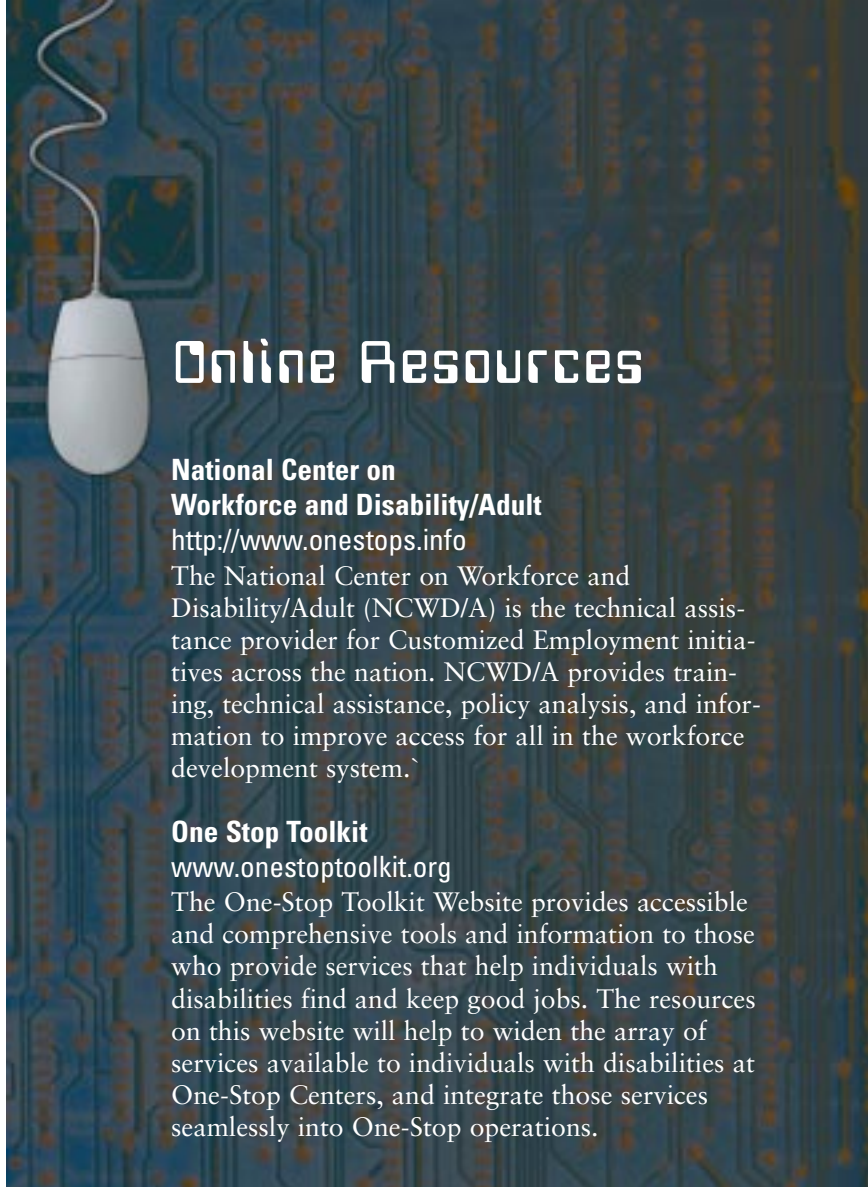
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so that individuals receive employment services and support in a more coordinated and effective fashion, and

3. to provide a demonstration model for statewide replication during the project and sustainability of the model when federal funding ceases.

The partnership is lead by the Montgomery County Workforce Investment Board through the designated Workforce Investment Act (WIA) fiscal agent for the workforce investment area, the Montgomery County Department of Economic Development's Division of Workforce Investment Services.

A major objective of the five year planning and implementation project is to produce a sustainable and well-researched mechanism that blends the resources of WIA-funded programs with those of designated disability employment programs so that people with significant disabilities may achieve their career aspirations through an effective, integrated system. Ultimately, this will be one effort to make sure that employment will be a real possibility rather than a mere rhetorical pipedream for more people with significant disabilities who want to work.



## Online Resources

### **National Center on Workforce and Disability/Adult**

<http://www.onestops.info>

The National Center on Workforce and Disability/Adult (NCWD/A) is the technical assistance provider for Customized Employment initiatives across the nation. NCWD/A provides training, technical assistance, policy analysis, and information to improve access for all in the workforce development system.

### **One Stop Toolkit**

[www.onestoptoolkit.org](http://www.onestoptoolkit.org)

The One-Stop Toolkit Website provides accessible and comprehensive tools and information to those who provide services that help individuals with disabilities find and keep good jobs. The resources on this website will help to widen the array of services available to individuals with disabilities at One-Stop Centers, and integrate those services seamlessly into One-Stop operations.

## Spotlight on MCEP Partner



The Career Transition Center, Inc. (CTC) is a non-profit organization established to provide a broad range of employment related services, specifically those mandated by the Workforce Investment Act. CTC, Inc. is the contracted operator of MontgomeryWorks, the Montgomery County, MD One Stop Career Center, and works in partnership with many other agencies while serving thousands of job seekers annually.

For more information about CTC, please visit its comprehensive website.

<http://www.mcctc.com>



## MCEP Update

### MCEP Kicks Off

At a special event on April 28, 2004, the Maryland Customized Employment Partnership (MCEP) was officially introduced to the community of Montgomery County. MCEP is a five-year demonstration model development project funded by the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), U.S. Department of Labor, and led by the Montgomery County Workforce Investment Board. The initiative provides the incentive for planning and implementing provisions for people with disabilities to obtain universal access to workforce development services that are offered to the general public.

Over sixty (60) community representatives interested in the expansion of career opportunities for jobseekers with disabilities attended the open house at MontgomeryWorks in Wheaton, Montgomery County's One Stop Career Center. Attendees included disability employment service providers, One Stop staff, members of the Workforce Investment Board, as well as representatives from the Developmental Disabilities Administration, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council. Representatives from Congressman Chris Van Hollen's office, and the U.S. Department of Labor also attended.

The event's speakers included Eric Seleznow, Director of the Division of Workforce Investment Services; David Edgerley, Director of Economic Development for the County (representing County Executive Douglas Duncan); Dewey Thomas, President of the Workforce Investment Board; Nancy Floreen, County Councilwoman; Richard Luecking, President of TransCen, Inc., and Lisa Cuzzo, MCEP Project Manager. A reception followed the program.

The overall focus of the event was to introduce the purposes of the Maryland Customized Employment Partnership:

- To expand the capacity of MontgomeryWorks to serve customers with significant disabilities;
- To leverage and align resources from typically disparate categorical service systems; and
- To provide a demonstration model for statewide replication.

The event also served as an opportunity for MCEP partners and guests to meet and network.



# Tools of the Trade

## *The Positive Personal Profile*

One of the first strategies utilized in creating customized employment opportunities for jobseekers is to develop a Positive Personal Profile (PPP). This is one way to capture a job candidate's skills and potential contributions for employment. A PPP is typically created by spending time with the jobseeker, talking with the people who know him or her best, and collecting information from other sources familiar with the individual. Helping a

jobseeker create a positive profile helps to outline the contributions he or she can make in the workplace.

What follows are some examples of specific areas and questions to consider when developing a PPP. This list should by no means be considered exhaustive or complete. Consider it a beginning... to truly get to know the job seeker so that successful customized job matches can be developed.

### Interests and Preferences

- Enjoyed activities
- Leisure time activities (sports, hobbies, etc.)
- Environmental preferences (indoors/outdoors, noisy/quiet, many people/few people, slow/quick pace, time of day, etc.)
- Talents
- How new tasks are learned

### Life and Work Experiences

- Paid or unpaid work experiences (including volunteer activities) – focus on the tasks completed rather than the place.
- Household chores are completed regularly (both assigned and voluntary)
- Community activities

### Skills and Knowledge

- Vocational training
- Academic skills (reading, math, time, money)

### Dislikes, etc.

- Known disliked activities
- Situations to avoid

### Accommodation and Support Needs

- Services currently provided
- Accommodations needed for success (i.e, physical accessibility, technological, personal care, etc.)
- Supports needed for maintenance

### Transportation Resources

- Current uses
- Transportation resources necessary for the jobseeker to maintain a job

### Other General Observations

- Temperament
- Admired characteristics
- Dream job
- Habits, routines or idiosyncrasies

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*America works best when  
all Americans work.*

*Elaine L. Chao  
U.S. Secretary of Labor*

## customized employment in action

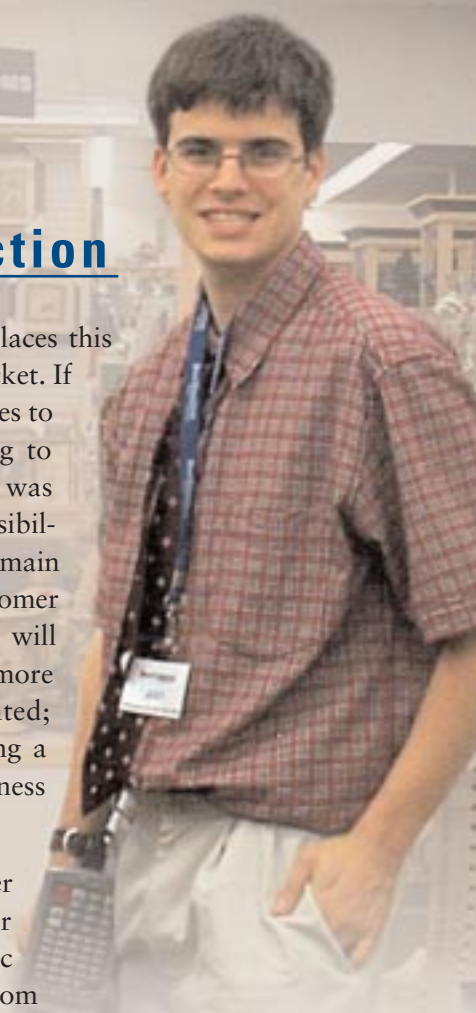
Joey is a 21 year old recent student from Montgomery County Public Schools. Joey was referred to MCEP as he was getting ready to exit his special education transition program. Before exiting high school, Joey was approved for long-term job search and support funding from the Developmental Disabilities Administration, but at the time of graduation the funding was not yet available. Therefore, he was unable to receive immediate services from the adult developmental disabilities service provider.

An MCEP career specialist worked with Joey, his family, the school, and the employment service provider to determine Joey's interests and potential contributions to a work environment. Joey indicated that he was most interested in stocking and receiving, where he might have some level of independent responsibility. It was most important for him to keep busy and have a structure to his activities. He was NOT interested in washing dishes, sitting in one place, or working with individuals his own age.

The career specialist met with a variety of businesses near Joey's home. After meeting with a local retail clothing store (and listening carefully to their needs), the MCEP career specialist presented Joey's skills and interests while explaining the concept of customized employment. The general manager of the store loved the idea and said that she wanted to create a position where Joey was able to contribute his skills as a "markdown attendant." Joey moves from section to section within the store scanning items on display. If the item is ready for markdown, a tick-

et will print, and Joey places this sticker on the scanned ticket. If nothing prints, Joey moves to the next item. According to the employer, this task was always a "fill-in" responsibility by other staff whose main job is to attend to customer needs. This job creation will allow other staff to be more customer-service oriented; and Joey will be fulfilling a steady and essential business need.

Joey works 25 hours per week, earns \$7.00 per hour and takes public transportation to and from work. By the time this position was negotiated and secured, the employment service provider received the funding needed to provide follow-up support to Joey. As a result of pooled resources of the school system, One Stop Career Center, a disability employment service provider, and the Developmental Disabilities Administration, Joey is now enjoying a job customized to his individual circumstances.





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MCEP is committed to and is making every possible effort to ensure that all materials developed, procured, maintained, or used by MCEP are accessible to people with disabilities. Please contact us if you would like to receive this newsletter in an alternative format.

**Contributing Authors**

Richard Luecking, Lisa Cuzzo, Eric Seleznow

**Graphic Design**

José Luis Díaz

**Contact Information**

Lisa Cuzzo

MCEP Project Manager

11160 Veirs Mill Road, #100

Wheaton, Maryland 20902

email: [lcuozzo@montgomeryworks.com](mailto:lcuozzo@montgomeryworks.com)

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**MCEP Partners & Collaborators**

Montgomery County Department of Economic Development,  
Division of Workforce Investment Services

TransCen, Inc.

Career Transition Center, Inc.

Independence Now

WayStation, Inc.

Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services

Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration

Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services

Montgomery County Public Schools



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MontgomeryWorks One Stop Career Center

11160 Veirs Mill Road, #100

Wheaton, MD 20902

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