

CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT—CAREER EXPLORATION

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Issue No. 7

This Grab and Go Practice is part of a series helping students, parents, teachers, and job developers create customized employment opportunities for students with disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

Teachers, transition specialists, job developers, college career office staff, and coaches can all play an important role in helping students with intellectual disabilities discover their work interests. Learning about a student can help team members identify specific career focus areas that can be explored further through career exploration activities. These activities include going on job tours, job shadowing, job sampling, informational interviews, and doing volunteer work. The career service office on campus is also a great resource.

It is important that students explore different types of jobs and career fields so they can make an informed decision on what type of work they want to do in the future. There are a variety of ways for students to get started. Using the student's, the parent's, and even your own network can identify people who could help set up career exploration activities.

STUDENT CAREER SERVICES

For dually enrolled students, the college career services office is a great first stop. Students can take a range of online career interest inventories that help identify potential career pathways. A number of websites can also help students connect their interests to possible job types, including:

- O*NET Online • www.onetonline.org
- My Next Move • www.mynextmove.org
- Kuder Navigator • www.kudernavigator.com

The career services office can help students with job readiness skills, such as writing resumes, developing portfolios for potential interviews, and preparing effective cover letters. This office often provides small classes in interviewing and networking skills, and can help identify people on campus who the student could speak to about a specific career field. College career counselors sometimes offer workshops that help students match their academic course selections with their career choices. The

Story of discovery

Kate is interested in a career involving fashion and costume design. She likes looking through fashion magazines, going shopping for new clothes, and discussing new trends. This interest led her to taking a variety of theater, costume, and stage makeup classes in college. She participated in an internship at the campus costume shop, and one summer volunteered backstage at a local theater company where she worked with professional costume designers, actors, and producers. Kate also found a job working several hours a week at a boutique clothing store where she and her mother were regular customers.

college community also presents an opportunity for students to do internships, job shadowing, service learning, and to conduct informational interviews.

BUSINESS COMMUNITY

The business community is an excellent place for career exploration. Local employers and non profit organizations can often be recruited to provide short-term career awareness activities. Here are a few examples.

Job tour

A job tour provides an opportunity for a student (and you) to tour a local business and gain an overall view of the workings of a company, the culture, and the types of jobs it has. A tour can sometimes lead the student to identify a particular task they may be interested in trying. After the job tour, ask if the student could spend half a day job-shadowing one of the employees.

Job shadowing

Job shadowing allows the student to be paired with a worker and observe first-hand how different tasks are done. Students can learn what skills are needed, find out what the work environment is like, and get a chance to meet other employees.

Job sampling

Job sampling is an exploration activity where students try a variety of job tasks in a range of work settings. Work with the student to choose businesses that are related to the vocational themes identified in the discovery phase. From the job tour specific tasks are identified within the business that the student is interested in trying. The coach's role is to assist the person to become acclimated to the business, help teach specific job skills, observe the student's performance and educate coworkers about people with disabilities being part of the workforce. It is considered that 20 hours per job experience is a reasonable time for the student to determine if they have an interest and the skill set needed to perform a particular kind of work.

Informational interview

An informational interview is a great way for a student to learn about a specific business and job field. In this case, the goal is not to get the student a job, but to learn more about the inner workings of a business. It's also an opportunity for the student to practice their interviewing skills and to develop a relationship with a prospective employer.

With the student's permission contact a business you already have a relationship with and explain that you are helping the student learn about different careers.

Help the student make a list of questions they would like to ask. For example:

- What steps would you recommend for building a career in this field?
- How do you get started in this career?
- What are the key skills or qualities you look for in a job applicant?
- Do workers have a set schedule, or are the hours flexible?
- Would it be possible to arrange a tour of the business?

Volunteer work

Volunteer work is another way to give students job experience and build their resume while exploring different work environments. Ensure that any volunteer work is age-appropriate, matches the student's interests, and is a typical volunteer job that any person could participate in. You should also make this a time-limited career exploration activity. Your local United Way chapter should have a list of nonprofit organizations that need volunteers.

IDENTIFYING IMPORTANT FACTORS

By observing the student working in different job settings, you can assess their interests and abilities, and then identify the elements that make up a good job match. These factors may include: environmental elements (noise, temperature, indoors/outdoors), work stamina, speed, lifting and carrying strength, complexity of tasks, ability to self-initiate, attention to detail, and level of communication with coworkers. This information will become important when you are analyzing different job tasks and work environments with potential employers.

Methods for documenting the career exploration process:

- Photograph career exploration activities to document preferences and tasks the student performs successfully.
- Start an online career exploration blog.
- Have students reflect on their experiences by journaling.

CONCLUSION

Job tours, job shadowing, job sampling, informational interviews, and volunteering are all great ways for students to discover what type of work they may want to do, and what they are best suited for. Feedback from the student and your observations can help customize employment opportunities that are consistent with the student's strengths, needs, and interests. This process of exploration will help the students you support to make informed decisions in choosing a future career path.

REFERENCES

- Griffin, C., & Hammis, D. (2015). *Developing Vocational Themes: Workbook*.
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The Think College Transition Project is funded by an Investing in Innovation Development Grant # U411C130149 from the Office of Innovation and Improvement with matching funds provided by the Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation. Think College is a project of the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

RECOMMENDED CITATION: Hooley, R. (2018). *Customized Employment—Career Exploration, Think College Grab and Go Practices, Number 7*. Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston.

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