

Researchers help people with disabilities raise employment expectations

May 21 2015, by Mike Krings

After completing schoolwork, individuals with disabilities may be directed to a life of sheltered employment or a group home setting. University of Kansas researchers have been battling that type of guidance by proving that it is possible for individuals with disabilities to hold meaningful employment and live independently. Those researchers are sharing resources and training community members to spread the message, and now, they're taking it to other states.

The Family Employment Awareness Training, also known as FEAT, has helped individuals and families in Kansas improve their expectations about [employment](#) since 2010. Rhode Island contracted with the program, housed in KU's Beach Center on Disability, late last year, following a Department of Justice consent decree that the state was not providing equitable employment opportunities for all residents. Roughly 10 other states have shown interest as well. The program was born from a Medicaid Infrastructure Grant.

"Expectations for employment after finishing school were pretty low. They thought that was unacceptable and we needed to do something about it to help people realize that employment is possible and there are resources to help make it happen," said Judith Gross, assistant research professor in the Beach Center on Disability and director of FEAT.

Even when families and individuals were determined to achieve meaningful employment, it was often challenging as resources were decentralized and difficult to find. Supported living resources,

employment coaching, housing services, personal assistant services and other resources are commonly found in different offices and agencies, so it can be difficult for families to access, if they know they exist at all, Gross said.

To address the problem, FEAT offers a two-part workshop in communities throughout the state. FEAT is based on three simple principles:

- Everyone with a disability can work when provided with the appropriate support and services
- Everyone with a disability can have a job that is both enjoyable and satisfying
- Everyone with a disability will make more money working than by relying on public benefits alone.

Part one of FEAT focuses on increasing expectations for employment by sharing examples of individuals who are successfully competitively employed in their communities and talking about expectations for the transition from school to adulthood. Part one also brings employees, employers and entrepreneurs from the local community in which the training take place to share their stories about employment with FEAT participants.

Part two of FEAT shares what resources are available at the local, state and federal levels and brings representatives of those resources together with families to answer questions, share contact information and examples of services they've provided to families in similar situations.

"We try to talk about what's going on in Kansas, but not only that, what's going on in your community," Gross said. "We don't want this training to go on a shelf or be forgotten, so we offer followup meetings in the community Workforce Centers, which helps strengthen our Workforce

partners and helps families take that next step toward employment."

In 2013, Gross was awarded a National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research Field-initiated grant to assess the effect of FEAT on attendees. The followup surveys ask families what services they've accessed and how the process has worked for them. The feedback helps gauge the success of the training, determine how well families continue to navigate an often-challenging system and refine the training sessions as well. Parents of children from age 8 to 45 have taken part, and training is offered in Spanish in western Kansas communities.

Since late 2014, Gross and colleagues have worked with staff and faculty at Rhode Island College to adapt the Kansas FEAT materials to fit the state's needs. They are currently training parent information specialists who will then train and work with families throughout the state. Rhode Island sought KU's expertise in the wake of an April 2014 Department of Justice consent decree stating the state had been in violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act by not providing equitable employment to all. Individuals with disabilities were often steered toward "sheltered employment," in which they would perform menial tasks for sub-minimum wage pay. The decree enforced the Supreme Court's 2012 ruling in *Olmstead v. L.C.*, which required that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities be served in the most integrated settings appropriate.

"With higher expectations and more knowledge of resources out there, we find people take more steps toward employment," Gross said. "And employment is key to so many other things like independence, economic self-sufficiency, community participation, independent living and quality of life."

Provided by University of Kansas

Citation: Researchers help people with disabilities raise employment expectations (2015, May 21) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-05-people-disabilities-employment.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.