

# Survey shown effective in helping states improve employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities

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The push to end segregated employment in which individuals with disabilities are limited to menial work for sub-minimum wage pay is gaining momentum. Researchers at the University of Kansas are leading the way in promoting equal opportunity and pay as well as assisting states making the effort to end employment segregation. Now, a survey designed to assess training efforts for individuals and families has been shown to be an effective way to investigate many types of disability programs and resources, and states are beginning to put it to use.

The Community Employment Survey was developed at KU in 2012 as a way to measure the effectiveness of the Family Employment Awareness Training, also known as FEAT. Judith Gross, assistant research professor in KU's Bureau of Child Research, and Grace Francis of George Mason University have authored an article in the Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation describing the survey's development and use.

"We developed the survey because we wanted to ask, 'What are those things that we know are associated with competitive [employment](#) that we maybe haven't measured yet?'" Gross said. "We wanted to know if, after taking part in FEAT, if people used technical assistance, if they increased their knowledge and expectations, if they sought competitive employment or took other steps toward employment, such as setting a goal on a transition plan or contacting and using formal employment services."

FEAT is designed for individuals with disabilities and their families to increase expectations for competitive employment and awareness of resources in Kansas supporting individuals with disabilities to be competitively employed. The Employment First Initiative Act was passed by the Kansas Legislature in 2011 to improve employment opportunities and limit the use of segregated workshops in which individuals performed menial tasks for less than minimum wage. Segregated workshops have been prevalent across the United States, but in recent years, many states have begun taking steps to correct it.

Any state or agency looking to improve their employment opportunities, assess current efforts or climate toward competitive employment and more can use the Community Employment Survey. It specifically assesses seven constructs:

- Expectations for competitive employment for people with disabilities
- Knowledge of employment resources
- Barriers to attaining competitive employment
- Access to and use of resources
- Competitive employment outcomes
- Perceptions of FEAT
- Demographics

The measures of access to and use of resources and perceptions of FEAT can be adapted to any state and training program, respectively.

Gross said legislation has passed in 32 states with more than 40 states with some sort of Employment First activity seeking to end segregated employment, a practice that keeps individuals with disabilities in poverty and is morally indefensible. Competitive employment can lead to economic opportunity, independence, community integration and much more.

"All of those things are impossible if you're working for sub-minimum wage," Gross said.

Gross and colleagues are working with Kansas, Rhode Island, Illinois, South Dakota and Delaware in various capacities to help increase expectations for and knowledge of competitive employment. They are currently using the Community Employment Survey in Kansas and Rhode Island and hope to expand to additional states soon, and the possibilities for use are very wide.

"It could be used to assess the climate of a state to see if they are ready to make the conversion from sheltered employment to competitive employment," Gross said.

Any state, agency or individual who would like to use the survey or learn more about it or Family Employment Awareness Training can contact Gross at [jgross@ku.edu](mailto:jgross@ku.edu).

"Simply put, sheltered workshops are just another institution segregating people with disabilities away because of our unwillingness to accept that our perceived notions about their ability to work may be wrong," Curtis Decker, executive director of the National Disability Rights Network, wrote in the organization's report, "Segregated & Exploited." "This call to action is long overdue. It is time to end segregated work, sheltered employment and sub-minimum wage. Now."

Provided by University of Kansas

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