SPEECH LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS AND ADULTS WITH INTELLECTUAL AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES: LITERATURE-BASED FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNITY-BASED VOCATIONAL SKILL BUILDING PROGRAMS

by

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Primary Thesis Advisor

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the existing research on employment and vocational skills for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and to synthesize the baseline of a program teaching vocational skills to this population. The term 'intellectual and developmental disability' is defined most commonly as a genetics based developmental disorder that causes a significant deficiency in intellectual and behavioral functions in an individual, and tends to present with one or more comorbid, or coexisting, conditions including seizure disorders, attention deficit disorders, and autism spectrum disorder (Bartoshesky et al., 2021; Marrus & Hall, 2017). With the assistance of pre-existing community-based resources for individuals with IDD in combination with Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs), programming dedicated to teaching basic vocational skills that cover a wide range of job areas can be taught. Although vocational skills building is typically facilitated by a life coach for an IDD individual, working in combination with a Speech Language Pathologist provides additional support with the social-emotional communication-based skills necessary for vocational success. Employment for the IDD population is important as it aids individuals in communication skills, provides activity outside of community programming (e.g. adult day care), and allow for individuals with IDD the opportunity to gain the financial means for independent living.

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Chapter 1: What essential communication skills can Speech Language Pathologists teach to adults with IDD to improve their chances of employment?

The Role of Speech Language Pathologists for Adults with IDD

The diagnosis of an intellectual and developmental disability or the diagnosis of a comorbid disorder in an individual is typically made in early childhood and is based on the presence of delays in the milestone achievement in areas such as motor function, social interaction, and language/learning comprehension (Marrus & Hall, 2017). Based on a diagnosis of IDD or comorbid disorder, families receive federal assistance from the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) in the form of individualized programs targeting developmental therapy, which includes speech and language services targeting communication skills provided by a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) certified by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association or ASHA. Through IDEA, many children with IDD receive early interventional speech and language services, aiding in the necessary basic communication skills to function on a day-to-day basis. SLPs also provide augmentative and alternative communication services, or AAC, to individuals who do not have the capacity to communicate verbally, providing another means of communicating needs and holding conversation outside of a verbal or signed language.

Respecting Autonomy

When working with adults with IDD in any capacity, respecting the autonomy of the individual is paramount. With the introduction of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2006, the global distinguishment of mental vs legal capacity for individuals with intellectual disabilities was established. For many with severe

mental and physical disabilities, even after reaching adulthood, a primary caregiver (e.g. parent or guardian) holds the power of attorney for the individual in question, meaning that an individual with IDD has another to act on their behalf in regard to processes such as making financial and medical decisions. Although the term 'power of attorney' is often found in legal decisions, this position is based on the individuals mental capacity, or their capability to make decisions. The legal capacity of an individual that falls under CRPD provides security of legal personhood, giving them the legal right for autonomy (Watson, 2023). Although traditionally personhood and autonomy is seen as being directly linked to mental capabilities or intellect, the creation of CRPD has provided the legal groundwork to ensuring that individuals with IDD are respected in autonomy, therefore it is the responsibility of those who work with individuals with IDD to respect their right of autonomy and aid them in gaining skills for independence.

Historically, individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities or other comorbid disabilities have not had much say in the type of care that they have received, were perceived as the 'freakish' and 'underdeveloped' people of society, and/or were discriminated against legally and medically through terminology such as the use of 'mental retardation' to label what is now referred to as 'intellectually disabled'. Through the 2000s, the term 'mental retardation' was legally usable as a category for individuals with intellectual and learning disabilities at both the state and federal level. It wasn't until the signing of Rosa's Law by former President Barack Obama on October 5th, 2010 which amended several acts, including IDEA, and required for the phrasing 'mental retardation' to be changed to 'intellectual disability' at the federal level, but did not compel states to also enforce this change in language (Rosa's Law, 2010)(Wilkinson, 2006).

One thing that SLPs can do to aid in respecting the autonomy of individuals with IDD is to assist in forming strategies for self-advocacy. In a paper written by Siva Priya Santhanam and Monica L. Bellon-Harn titled Speech-Language Pathologist's Role in Understanding and Promoting Self-Advocacy in Autistic Adults, the authors discuss how SLPs can assist in a secondary-education setting, providing a series of guidelines to support adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to help facilitate self-advocacy between student to professor and peer to peer communication as outlined in Table 1. Summary of micro- and macrolevel guidelines to promote or support self-advocacy among autistic college students (Santhanam & Bellon-Harn, 2022; p. 653).

Although Santhanam and Bellon-Harn's research focuses on secondary-education interactions, teaching self-advocacy skills to individuals with IDD regardless of mental or legal capacity as defined by CRPD is paramount to success within employment, especially in situations in which the individual faces discrimination and/or ableism from fellow employees or members of the general public. Additionally, individuals with IDD require self-advocacy skills in order to create a safer working environment for themselves.

National Database Reports

Across the U.S. there are a series of four national databases that have collected data in reference to employment and individuals with disabilities: the American Community Survey (ACS), the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Case Service Report (referred to as RSA-911), the National Core Indicators-Adult Consumer Survey (NCI-ACS), and the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2). Using the datasets from the national databases, a number of papers have been published cross-examining the relationship between employment and individuals with IDD as reported by Qian et al., 2018. The authors of this book chapter

reported on the strengths and weaknesses of the datasets, as well as employment trends that other authors have reported based off of national datasets as seen in the Table 2.

Table 1 - Summary of micro- and macrolevel guidelines to promote or support self-advocacy among autistic college students (Santhanam & Bellon-Harn, 2022; p. 653)

No.	Guidelines
1	Start early: Meet with the student during the first semester in college or prior to admissions if possible.
2	Complete an informal assessment of student self-advocacy (see Appendix A).
3	Discuss assessment results with the student to determine goals.
4	Involve the student in identifying priority goals (e.g., e-mail communication with professor and communication during group work).
5	Revise goals and be flexible based on the student's changing priorities or educational circumstances.
6	Work with the student in increasing knowledge of rights within the college environment.
7	Identify or establish communication opportunities (e.g., one-on-one peer support, group interactions with other autistic and nonautistic peers, and interactions with professors).
8	Identify or establish opportunities for the student to engage with autistic and nonautistic peers based on shared interests and common goals.
9	Connect the student to resources within and beyond the college/university.
10	Educate and involve campus community including colleagues from other disciplines and nonautistic students periodically in trainings and other efforts to • promote understanding of autism and autistic students, • develop teaching and support strategies for autistic students within and outside the classroom, • establish activities and events to reduce negative perceptions toward autistic students, and • identify and modify existing practices that may not benefit autistic students.

Note. Remember to involve and partner with autistic students or other autistic individuals such as teaching or nonteaching members within the university setting as you plan and develop programming.

These national datasets provide essential information about the employment success for individuals with IDD. This data is paramount in understanding the employment history for individuals with IDD, specifically as to where these individuals are most likely to find employment. This allows for identification of what communication skills will be essential to success within that employment field, providing a clear picture of what skills a SLP can assist in teaching while working with a pre-existing community-based skill-building program.

Table 2 – National Trends of Employment for Individuals with IDD (Qian et al., 2018)

Database	Collected By	Year of Collection	Purpose	Strengths	Weaknesses	Employment Trends
ACS	U.S. Census Bureau	2016	How funding needs to be spent for Americans	Gathers data on employment for individuals with any disability	Does not ask if the participant has IDD/Does not collect data on work settings	26.4% of individuals with IDD between 21-64 years of age were employed in 2016
NCI-ACS	NASDDDS*/HSRI**	2009-2015	Track NASDDDS organizational performance over time; Establish national benchmarks for performance for adults with IDD	Asks adults with IDD about employment, if the participant has a job, what type of job it is, and the hourly wage	Only surveys adults with IDD receiving at least one paid service in addition to the state IDD system	2009: 19% of individuals with IDD held a community-based job, 47% worked unpaid in a sheltered workshop 2015: 17% of individuals with IDD held a community-based job, 39% worked unpaid in a sheltered workshop
RSA-911	U.S. Department of Education Rehabilitation Service Administration	2015	Collects employment by state statistics	Collects data on if a participant has IDD and what setting in which they are employed	Only collects data on individuals enrolled in a state Vocational Rehabilitation agency, Did not distinguish between full-time or part-time work in integrated settings	30% of individuals with IDD enrolled in a state vocational rehabilitation agency were employed
NLTS2	U.S. Department of Education	2000-2010	Collected data on individuals in special education programs from ages 13 to 21	Collected data on participants post-school status in employment, the type of work done, the hours worked, and the wages received	Did not collect information on the job setting	38.8% of individuals with IDD were employed at the time of the interview when 60% of the respondants had left secondary education

[*National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services; ** Human Services Research Institute]

Common Employment Opportunities for Individuals with IDD

When identifying common employment areas, there are three main types of employment options in which individuals with IDD can find employment in: sheltered employment, supported employment, and competitive employment (Walsh et al., 2014). Each of these employment options has different benefits and disadvantages for those employed, particularly concerning wages and health benefits.

Sheltered Employment

Sheltered employment is designed to employ individuals with disabilities in a segregated setting, where employees are either not paid or are paid below minimum wage. In 2009, the NCI-ACS reported 47% of employed individuals with IDD worked in a sheltered workshop without pay and in 2015, reported that number had dropped to 39% (Qian et al., 2018).

Supported Employment

Supported employment employs individuals with disabilities within a community-based setting, most often paid below the minimum wage of $7.25 an hour. The NCI-ACS reported that in 2009, 19% of employed individuals with IDD worked in a community-based job and that in 2015, the number had dropped to 17%, with 41% of those individuals making less than minimum wage and for those with severe IDD, the number increased to 89% (Qian et al., 2018).

Competitive Employment

Competitive employment or competitive integrated employment (CIE) employs individuals with disabilities with work at an equivalent rate to individuals without disabilities. Studies have reported that individuals with IDD in CIE gain higher wages than those working in sheltered workshops or in supported employment and worked more hours while having better

overall mental health and quality of life, as well as better overall behavioral regulation (Taylor et al., 2023).

Essential Skills

There are two types of skills that lend themselves to vocational success that SLPs can aid in teaching; social-emotional communication skills and behavioral regulation skills. SLPs would primarily support the learning of social-emotional skills, with the communication aspect of understanding and formulating a socially appropriate response to prompting falling under the speech therapy umbrella that SLPs work under. In terms of behavioral regulation skills, SLPs can assist in the communication aspect of this skill area, although behavioral regulation is most typically done with a behavioral therapist. SLPs can help in this area by practicing communication of boundaries as well as conversational skills to remove oneself from a situation in which they are uncomfortable or feel unsafe (e.g., how to appropriately remove oneself from a conversation with an irate customer).

Most social-emotional skills are developed in early educational settings, but for those with a developmental delay, these skills may take longer to develop based on the severity of the diagnosis. Social emotional learning, or SEL, is a commonly used classification of skills in primary educational settings with several variations of skill classifications used (Jones & Doolittle, 2017). One of the most common formats of SEL comes from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) and classifies social-emotional skills into 5 categories as seen in Table 3. Another format of SEL, which will be used for the purposes of this thesis, classifies social-emotional skills into three categories instead (see Table 4): cognitive regulation, emotional processes, and social and interpersonal skills.

Table 3 – CASEL Format of SEL (Jones & Doolittle, 2017)

Self-awareness	the ability to identify one's one emotions, thoughts, and values and understand how they guide our behavior
Self-management	the abilty to successfully regulate one's own emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different settings, and setting/working toward goals
Social awareness	the ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, and to understand social and ethical norms for behavior
Relationship skills	the ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed
Responsible decision-making	the ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms

While all three categories of SEL are important for individuals with IDD in a vocational skills program to learn, SLPs can assist specifically in the area of *social and interpersonal skills* by helping to improve receptive and expressive language skills. Receptive language skills deal with comprehension of communication, understanding what words are being used and what they mean to allow for the understanding of instructions or questions. Expressive language skills deal with creating comprehensible communication, the ability to create clear sentences in response to a statement or a question. Lois Bloom offers a simple comparison statement on the difference in receptive and expressive language in his paper *Talking, understanding, and thinking: Developmental relationship between receptive and expressive language* that lends itself well to SEL:

> "A disparity between perception [receptive language] and production [expressive language] has been presumed for a long time in speech and psychology as well as in art, and various attempts have been made to understand and explain it…Among the most often quoted examples of the difference between perception and production is the fact that children are able to recognize geometric shapes long before they can produce them." (Bloom, 1947; p.300).

Both receptive and expressive language are important for one's ability to find success in an educational or vocational setting.

SLPs can also help with improving vocal modulation and pronunciation skills for clarity of communication. Vocal modulation includes changes in the pitch, volume, and rate of speech that an individual produces during conversational speech, which has an impact on how well the listener can comprehend what the speaker has said. Vocal modulation also alters the perception and the behavior that the listener holds towards the speaker (Leongómez et al., 2021). While vocal modulation and pronunciation skills are important to the production of the message, they fall secondary to the importance of receptive and expressive language skills.

Table 4 – Stephanie Jones' Format of SEL (Jones & Doolittle, 2017)

Cognitive regulation	the ability to focus attention, plan, solve problems, coordinate behavior, make choices among competing alternitives, and override a preferred response in favor of a more appropriate one
Emotional processs	the ability to recgonize, express, and regulate one's own emotions and understand the emotions of others
Social and interpersonal skills	the ability to accurately interpret other people's behavior, effectively naviagte social situations, and interact positively with peers

Chapter 2: What instructional methods have researchers reported to be effective in teaching vocational skills?

Methodology

Literary Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted to identify peer-reviewed studies related to workforce participation among adults with developmental disabilities. The databases used in the literature search were: PsycINFO, PubMed, ERIC, and Google Scholar. Keyword search terms included a combination of:

- "developmental disabilities" OR "intellectual disabilities"
- "adults"
- "employment" OR "workforce participation" OR "vocational training"

The word "OR" was used to refine the search results. The searches were further limited to studies published in English and between 2010 and 2024.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included based on the following criteria:

- Focused on individuals aged 18 or older
- Identified participants as having an intellectual and developmental disability
- Addressed topic related to employment, job training, workplace inclusion, or vocational outcomes

Studies were excluded based on the following criteria:

- Focused only on children or adolescents
- Was not peer-reviewed

- Addressed disability in general without specification of developmental disabilities

Screening and Selection Process

The initial search resulted in 247 articles. After the removal of duplicate articles and the screening of abstracts for relevancy, 52 articled were reviewed in full. Out of the 52 articles, 18 total articles met the inclusion criteria and were included in the research process.

Data Extraction and Analysis

Key data was extracted from each article, including:

- Author(s), year, country of origin
- Study design
- Participation characteristics
- Employment outcomes or themes
- Barriers and facilitators to employment

A narrative synthesis approach was used to identify common themes across studies, including systematic barriers, supports for job retention, and program outcomes.

Additional Research

In addition to the comprehensive literature search, supporting research materials were obtained from Google Scholar and ASHA research databanks.

Instructional Methods

Available research focuses primarily on the general overall mechanics necessary for successfully teaching vocational skills to individuals with IDD, not specifically focusing on areas of speech and communication that a Speech Language Pathologist would be able to assist in teaching. However, it is still important to gain an understanding of what successful instructional

methods have been reported on in order to gain an understanding of the overall instructional methods that a program might utilize to teach employment skills.

There are number of instructional methods for teaching a wide variety of skills that incorporate a number of teaching methods that worked well for different individuals found in the literature. Through a number of studies reviewed in Gilson et al., 2017, several effective instructional methods for skills teaching have been identified, as seen in Table 5. Experimental data looking at the efficacy of teaching vocational skills that makes use of a combination of instructional methods have been reported upon as well. One example of use of combinations of instructional methods in teaching vocational skills comes from Dotson et al., 2013, with a study looking at teaching individuals with IDD self-employment skills. The experimenters created a 7-step instructional process used in a group setting in a 30-45 minute instructional session that was reported to be effective for the majority of the participants in the study: "(1) describing the skill, (2) identifying when and where it should be used, (3) providing rationales for why the skill is important, (4) breaking the skill down into component steps, (5) experimenter modeling of the skill for the group, (6) individual role-play practice, and (7) experimenter feedback." (Dotson et al., 2013; p. 2341).

The authors did not report how many instructional periods occurred during the experiment and the experiment took place over an unspecified number of months. The experimenters assessed the effectiveness of the instructional materials by testing each participants ability to complete one of the three types tasks after 4-6 instruction sessions, comparing the result to the participants baseline competency, measured prior to instructional sessions taking place, (Dotson et al., 2013; p.2341).

Recommendations & Limitations

Recommendations

From Dotson et al., 2013, a strong argument for the use of peer activities arose, that activities such as role-play interviews and social interactions between participants and instructors or caregivers can be used to effectively reinforce skills being taught and allow for individuals with IDD to create strategies for navigating social interactions. Partner activities with two individuals with IDD who are taught the same skills allows for the peers to reinforce what is being taught with one another, providing a supportive environment for skill building.

Table 5 – Interventional Methods (Gilson et al., 2017)

Interventional Method	**Description**
Self-management Instruction	Learning new skills using a self-managed system such as auditory prompting systems, computer devices, and checklists
Video-based Instruction	Video modeling, video prompting and feedback, video modeling and video prompting, video prompting and self-instruction, video instruction and instructor support, and video based instruction
Audio-based Instruction	Instructor providing instruction through an audio transmitting device
Picture/Tactile-based Instruction	Using picture prompts, symbols, and tactile cues
Direct Instruction	A live instructor provided prompts and procedures
AAC Device Assisted Instruction	Instruction for individuals who used augmentative and alternate communication devices (AAC devices)
Simulation Instruction	Instruction done in a vocational setting
Peer Instruction	Peer-to-peer mentorship and instruction for the introduciton of vocational skills

On the other hand, partner activities between an individual with IDD and an individual without IDD are equally as paramount, introducing scenarios in which spontaneous conversation and interaction can be done in a controlled environment, the controlled environment being a safe space for an individual with IDD to function in. This allows for individuals with IDD to identify steps to navigating conversations with a wide variety of behaviors and by using a combination of both partner activities between two individuals with IDD and between one individual with IDD and one without IDD, a broad range of social communication and conversational navigation skills can be taught to individuals within the program.

Limitations

As reported by Dotson et al., 2013, the effectiveness of various settings and instructional methods will be different for each individual involved. Some individuals may benefit from learning in a group setting, while others may benefit more from a one-on-one instructional setting.

Chapter 3: What types of activities can Speech Language Pathologists provide to support individuals in combination with a community-based interventional setting in acquiring speech specific vocational skills?

Activity Suggestions

There are a multitude of different activities that can be facilitated in order to help individuals with IDD in learning social and interpersonal skills (see Table 4) and how to use them in social, and therefore vocational, situations. These activities can include identifying safe and not safe topics to share, mock conversations, role play interviews, practice with code switching, and how to communicate boundaries when one is overwhelmed.

Another thing to keep in mind is how the activity is structured to ensure that it is concise and understandable to everyone. This includes identifying the objectives of the session, describing what main objective is being worked on and why, describing the effective ways to complete the main objective, practicing achieving that objective, and identifying what the next session will cover. These parts should be adjusted to fit the lesson and what will best help the participants comprehend the lesson being taught.

Example Activity

An activity that may be of assistance in navigating social situations is identifying information about oneself that is and is not appropriate to share as well as topics that are and are not safe to ask another person when you are first getting to know them. A sample lesson plan for identifying safe vs. not safe information can be found in Appendix A with the corresponding worksheet in Appendix B. The follow up lesson plan for role playing a conversation using the worksheet can be found in Appendix C.

Positive Behavioral Support

During activities, there may be moments when participants are overwhelmed or are unsure of the demands of the activity and find themselves frustrated. This may lead to behavioral issues arising, as individuals with IDD often times have difficulty with self-regulation. Behavioral issues for individuals with IDD may occur due to an individuals' inability to communicate their needs in a socially acceptable manner and switching to a purely behavioral response (e.g. hitting, screaming, throwing objects, etc.) in an attempt to escape the situation (Bopp et al., 2004).

One way to help balance activities and behavioral needs in order to create a safe and productive environment is through positive behavioral support. This can be done by reviewing/reminding individuals at the beginning of each session that if they need an instruction to be repeated or if they need to take a break that they are to communicate that either verbally or through a signed gesture or signal without feeling as if their needs are not worthy of being acknowledged or are unwelcome. By creating a clearly communicated standard for communication of boundaries and assistance requests, a positive and supportive environment can be created.

Research suggests that another thing that can be implemented in order to ensure that sessions are facilitated in a manner that supports positive behavioral support is using visual schedules of what the session will cover. This suggestion comes from research studying the use of schedules for individuals with ASD, a known comorbid disorder, and its success at redirecting behavioral incidences (Dooley et al., 2001, Bopp et al., 2004).

Addressing Behavioral Incidents

Even with positive behavioral support within the learning environment, participants can still have behavioral outbursts in the instructional setting. It is recommended that the SLP does not directly intervene unless the situation requires it, instead relying on a present caretaker or program staff member to handle the incident while redirecting focus back to the task at hand for the other participants.

Additional Behavioral Considerations

Research published by the University of Groningen in 2015 looks at the impact of expectations from teachers and parents on the success of individuals with IDD in terms of capability to be successful vocationally. This paper reported that that there was statistical significance "[w]hen school teachers expected their student to be able to work in competitive employment, the respondents had a nearly three times higher odds to enter competitive employment…compared to respondents with school teachers expecting that their student[s] would not be able to work in competitive employment." (Holwerda et al., 2015; para. 23). The authors also reported that parents were found to be less likely to expect their child to not enter into competitive employment when the child did, a false negative expectation, while teachers were found to be less likely to expect the student to enter into competitive employment when the student did not, a false positive expectation.

While the success of the individual with IDD in gaining and maintaining vocational skills is directly impacted by the participant's willingness to engage in instructional materials and the severity of their diagnosis, this research shows that the expectations of teachers and parents and how the instructor approaches teaching the materials, all have a direct impact on how well an individual with IDD does with gaining and maintaining vocational skills. By creating a positive

environment with high yet realistic expectations, instructors can provide a supportive atmosphere for individuals with IDD and promote success amongst participants.

Community Setting Considerations

When finding/working with community programming, there are a series of considerations to keep in mind in order to provide ample, unbiased support to all participants. This includes the differences in resource availability between urban and rural areas, income disparity, and language and cultural barriers that may arise when working with various communities. By being conscientious of these factors, an SLP can alter how they approach teaching methods for a program to best encompass what is both necessary to teach and what is the most socially (and culturally) sensitive way to approach topics amongst a wide range of backgrounds, socioeconomic statuses, and languages spoken.

Urban vs. Rural Areas

One of the major hurdles for SLPs partnering with a local program to teach these skills is finding a vocational skill building program within the community. While in more urban areas, programs for individuals with IDD may be more readily available, in more rural areas, there is a likely chance that a program along these lines does not exist, making it impossible for an SLP to support an already existing program. Working with city community centers independently of a pre-existing program is likely to add additional costs of renting rooms and scheduling times for a program to take place, along with the lack of additional instructors for other essential, non-speech-specific vocational skills such as resume writing, computer based skills (for data entry), and job specific skills (e.g. how to run a checkout, how to organize stock/inventory, etc.).

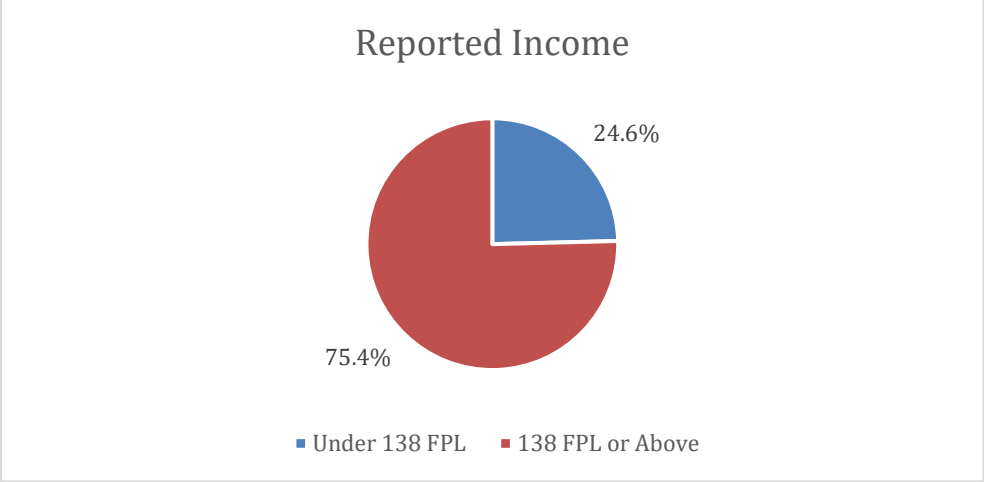
Income Disparity

Individuals and families of individuals with IDD quite often fall just above or at the poverty level in terms of income. These individuals also most often have medical insurance through Medicaid/Medicare programming, which collects data on the recipients of its long-term services including on individuals with IDD. In a report collected by the Medicaid and CHIP Payment Access Commission (MACPAC), data collected from 2021 to 2024 provides a shocking image of the income disparity for individuals with IDD, as seen in Figures 1-5 (Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission, 2025). Being aware of the socio-economic statuses of the individuals that a SLP will be helping aids in keeping oneself aware of biases and prejudices that may arise during sessions.

Language and Cultural Barriers

The U.S. is known as a cultural melting pot due to the high number of immigrants that have come from all over the world. As such, there will be times in which both cultural and language barriers may arise during treatment. Sometimes referred to as having a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background, these individuals may require additional services such as assistance from a professional interpreter (Huang et al., 2019). When working with CALD individuals, both proper translations and an understanding of cultural sensitivities will allow for a SLP to best approach the session, minimizing biases and miscommunications and maximizing positive impact of treatment.

Figure 1 – Reported Income (Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission, 2025)

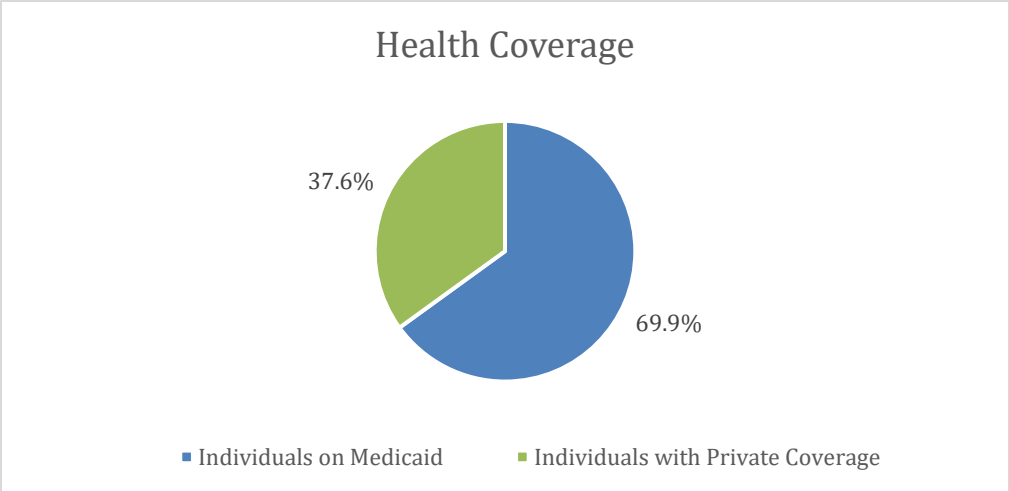


FPL – Federal Poverty Level

138th percentile is used to determine eligibility for Medicaid/Medicare services

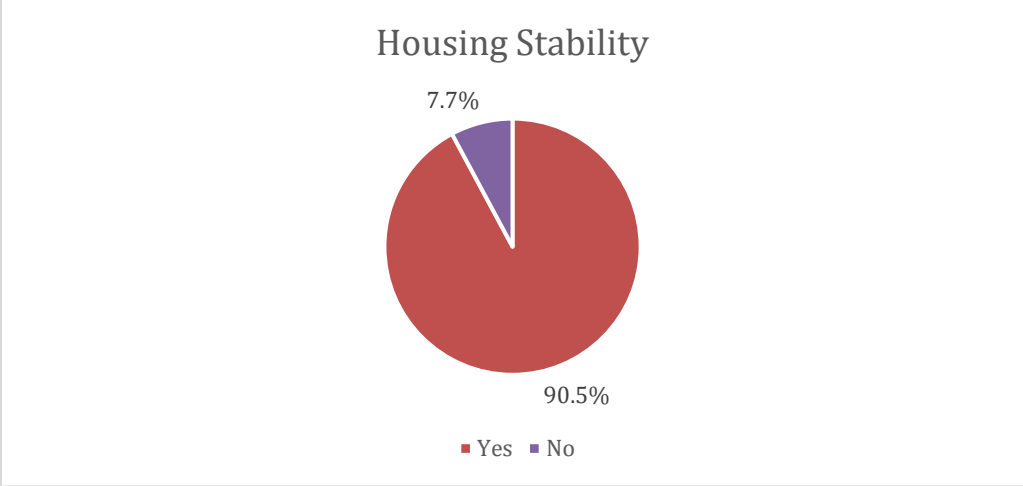
As based on the reported FPL in 2024 of an annual income of $20,783

Figure 2 – Health Coverage (Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission, 2025)



As reported by individuals with an annual income less than $20,00

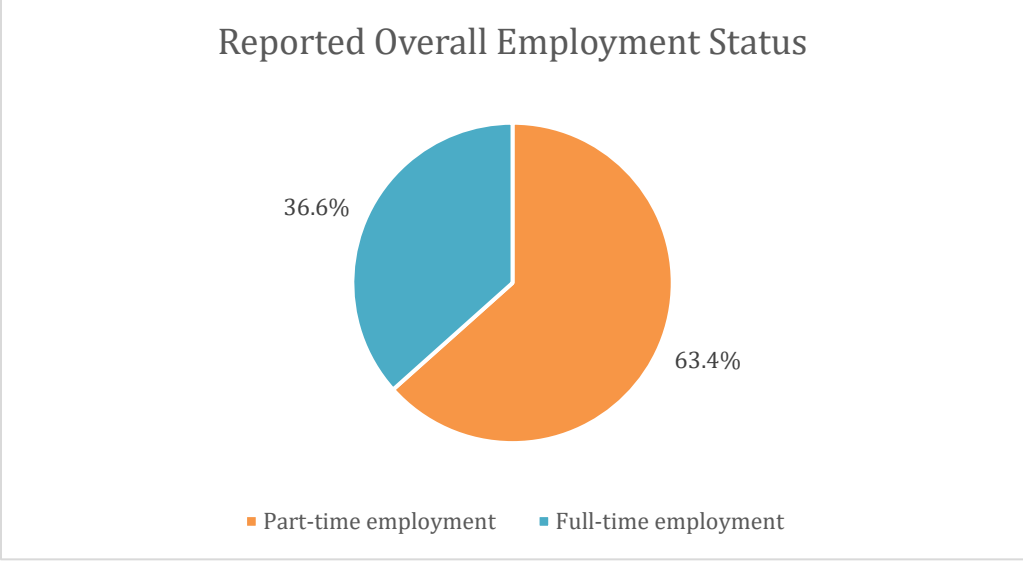
Figure 3 – Housing Stability (Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission, 2025)



Individuals responded yes if they had a place to live when taking the survey, and responded no if they did not have a steady place to live

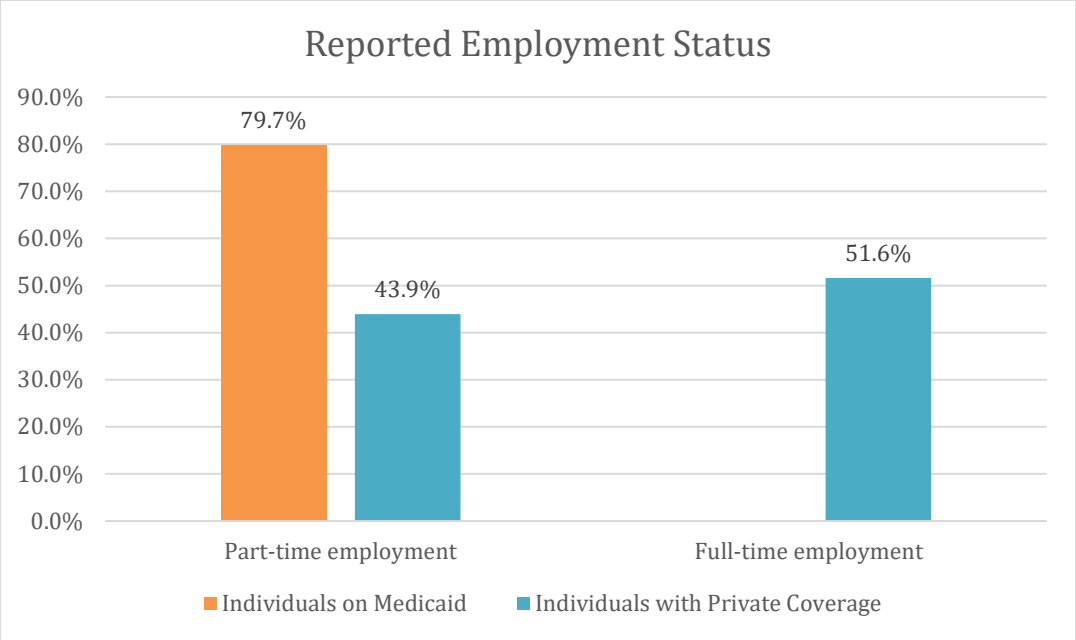
Individuals that responded yes also responded that they were worried about losing stable housing within the next 6 months

Figure 4 – Reported Overall Employment Status (Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission, 2025)



Overall employment status as reported without regard to health coverage status

Figure 5 – Reported Employment Status (Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission, 2025)



Reported employment status with regard to health coverage status

Further Considerations

The aim of this thesis is to provide a framework for working with pre-existing community-based vocational skill building programs, and should be used as such. Further research and implementation with working with these programs should be used to expand the understanding of what works best for different situations and how best to approach community programming in different areas for individuals with different needs and experiences. This will include recording and reporting upon demographic information of program participants to allow for SLPs to have a greater understanding of the types of individuals they will likely work with in order to determine what additional supports would best benefit the participants. Further research and reports should also look to expand understanding as to what types of activities are most beneficial and how best to teach the skills necessary for vocational success for individuals with

IDD. Through collaboration with community-based programming, SLPs can look to expand upon what research is available and help further the understanding of what individuals with IDD need in order to be successful vocationally.

Other considerations include the accessibility of these programs for individuals with IDD. Many individuals with IDD and their families rely on aid from insurance such as Medicaid and the current federal fiscal impact on the Medicaid/Medicare programs will have unknown consequences on individuals reliant on those services, regardless of disability status. Taking into consideration the insurance transition period for individuals with IDD after exiting high school or an equivalent program when they lose access to their parent's/caregiver's Medicaid coverage as they have not perused further education in a university or trade school program is paramount as well as understanding the impact that insurance coverage has on gaining access to both one-on-one and group sessions provided by SLPs and similar professions.

Appendix A – Sample Lesson Plan for Trading Information Step One – Identifying Safe vs. Not Safe Information

Overview -
Lesson - how to talk about myself with someone new
Activity - identify topics to talk about with someone new
- safe topics to share vs. topics to avoid

Lesson –
What is trading information?

Talking about myself + asking others about them to get to know them

Why do we trade information?

- Find friends
- To pass the time
- To avoid awkward silence
- Gain information

Rationale

In our work setting, we typically interact with three types of people

- Managers, bosses
- Collogues
- Customers

Often times, small talk is involved in our jobs

What info can we share

Safe topics to share

- Hobbies
- Interests
- School, work
- Favorites (books/activities/foods/etc.)
- Fun facts
- Goals and dreams

What info should we not share or wait to share

Topics to avoid

- Personal identifiers like phone number, address (where you live)
- Sensitive personal details like health issues, family problems
- Overly specific information about your schedule or routine
- Topics that may make others feel uncomfortable

Activity –

- Breakout into groups
- Identify safe topics you would like to share about yourself
  - Hobbies

    - Interests
    - Favorites (books, tv shows, movies, sports)
    - Share about school experience or work setting
    - Share a fun fact about yourself
    - Share your future goals
- Record your answers for the next session with the worksheet

Next Step/Next Session –
- Role play interaction sharing the information recorded on the worksheet

Appendix B – Sample Worksheet for Trading Information Step One Lesson

name: _____

my hobbies
1.
2.
3.
4.

my interests
1.
2.
3.
4.

my favorites
1.
2.
3.
4.

what I like about school, work
1.
2.
3.
4.

fun facts about me
1.
2.
3.
4.

my future goals
1.
2.
3.
4.

Examples of fun facts by category

About Talents and Skills

- "I can whistle really loudly!"
- "I can say the alphabet backward."
- "I can juggle three balls!"
- "I know how to make paper airplanes."

About Hobbies or Interests

- "I love to bake cookies."
- "I enjoy building with Legos."
- "I collect stickers."
- "I'm really good at solving puzzles."

About Experiences

- "I've been on a big roller coaster!"
- "I once camped in a tent overnight."
- "I've visited an aquarium and touched a starfish."
- "I've tried a hot air balloon ride."

About Favorites

- "My favorite ice cream flavor is mint chocolate chip."
- "I love to watch superhero movies."
- "My favorite song always makes me want to dance."
- "I love the smell of fresh popcorn."

About Unique or Fun Traits

- "I can wiggle my ears."
- "I have a double-jointed thumb."
- "I can make up silly songs."
- "I can name all the planets in order!"

About Family or Pets

- "I have a cat named Whiskers."
- "I have two brothers who are twins."
- "I help take care of my family's garden."
- "I once had a fish that lived for five years!"

About Dreams or Goals

- "I want to learn to play the guitar."
- "I dream of visiting the beach one day."
- "I want to be a chef and cook for my family."
- "One day, I'd love to meet a dolphin."

Appendix C - Sample Lesson Plan for Trading Information Step Two – Role Play Conversation

Overview –
Review - how to talk about myself with someone new
Lesson - getting to know someone else by asking questions
Activity - role play (putting it all together)
- safe topics to ask about vs. topics to avoid

Review–
Rationale

In our work setting, we typically interact with three types of people
- Managers, bosses
- Collogues
- Customers

Often times, small talk is involved in our jobs

What is trading information?

Talking about myself + *asking others about them to get to know them*

Why do we trade information?
- Find friends
- To pass the time
- To avoid awkward silence
- Gain information

What info can we ask about

Safe topics to share
- Hobbies
- Interests
- School, work
- Favorites (books/activities/foods/etc.)
- Fun facts
- Goals and dreams

What info we should not ask about

Topics to avoid
- Personal identifiers like phone number, address (where you live)
- Sensitive personal details like health issues, family problems
- Overly specific information about your schedule or routine
- Topics that may make others feel uncomfortable

Activity –

Breakout into the same groups as in the previous session

Use the worksheets from the last session as a reference for safe information to share

Role Play Instructions

Practice having a conversation (there will be an image of the steps available for everyone to view during the activity^)
Step 1: Introduce yourself
Step 2: Share at least 2 pieces of information about yourself
Step 3: Learn at least 2 facts about your partner by asking questions
Once your group has finished, find someone in another group and practice with them

Example
instructor should provide an example of how the role play conversation should be done with a volunteer
^Suggest projecting a slide with the following information for participants to view throughout the activity

1. Say your name
- "Hi, my name is _____."
2. Ask a friendly question.
- "How are you today?"
- "What do you like to do?"
3. Share one or two facts about yourself.
- Examples: "I like music" or "I play basketball."

Continue steps 2 and 3 until you have learned 2 facts about your partner, then find another one

<u>Next Step/Next Session –</u>

How do we talk with specific types of people?

- Managers, bosses
- Colleagues
- Customers

What is code switching?

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