



The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) is designed to improve work access and outcomes for job seekers with and without disabilities. It asserts assistance to individuals with disabilities by providing job search, placement assistance, career counseling skills training, and other supportive services.

WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUTH WITH ASD AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

BY DR. JACKIE MARQUETTE

There may be a reason to now celebrate the new changes that can impact better employment outcomes for students with disabilities. The law is the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and it is designed to improve work access and outcomes for job seekers with and without disabilities. WIOA asserts assistance to individuals with disabilities by providing job search, placement assistance, career counseling skills training, and other supportive services that began July 1, 2015.

Our culture reveals to the general population of graduating high school students how to transition from high school into employment, college, the military, etc. However, our culture hasn't revealed how students with ASD, developmental disabilities and other health impairments (OHI) make effective school transitions to employment outcomes.

For over three decades federal initiatives have promoted employment for individuals with significant disabilities. Yet, the outcomes

for many students with autism and developmental disabilities remain unchanged year after year: unemployed, isolated from peers and languishing at home waiting for a service. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reported 16 to 24 year olds are unemployed and, even more disturbing, there remain 4.8 million job openings in our economy, the highest number of job vacancies since January of 2001. The question becomes - why aren't more youth getting employed? According to a report by the Council of Chief State School Officers (2014), a Task Force on Improving Career Readiness, indicates one possible cause may be our education system is not keeping up with the goal of getting students "college and career-ready."

According to the LEAD Center at the National Disability Institute (2015), the emphasis of WIOA on students and individuals with significant disabilities offer big changes in these ways:

1. The employment goal for people with disabilities – even those with the most significant or severe disabilities – is full or part-time work.
2. Students aged 14 - 21 are now included in career preparation and employment services.
3. The utilization of strength assessments to identify hidden abilities and talents.
4. The application of the discovery process for best ‘job match’.
5. The value of Customized Employment which utilizes an individualized approach to employment planning and job development— one person at a time...one employer at a time. This includes:
 - a. Job Carving & Task Reassignment - Thus a new job description is negotiated based on current, unmet workplace needs and needs of employee to do the job.
 - b. Job Sharing-- Unique arrangement to pair two employees together to accomplish the job.
 - c. Competitive integrated employment.
6. The emphasis on career pathways and partnerships to promote employment within industries and occupations.

How can the changes within WIOA look for an individual with a disability? Two examples are offered here. The first example is Sarah, emphasizing the benefits of strength identification and recognition. Sarah gained in-depth insight and discovered career options that matched her unique strengths and abilities.

Sarah is a woman in her early 20s and is on the autism spectrum and high functioning. She had a rough teenage life suffering from depression, being bullied, ridiculed, and rejected by her peers. Sadly, she tried several times to commit suicide. She came out of those years physically unharmed, but not emotionally. Although Sarah has bouts of depression, anxiety, and insecurity, she expressed interest in taking the Marquette Strengths and Career Index (MSCI) for insight and career options that matched her unique strengths and abilities.

Sarah loves toys and especially female super heroes which, to some people, appear age inappropriate. But she discovered these interests led her to a job working for a toy store. Also, her intense self-expression and enjoyment to enter into a good debate led to her interest in majoring in theater at the university. Recently, she decided on a career direction of becoming an actress and working in costume design. Lastly, Sarah’s harsh experiences of being bullied led to her deep passion to help young girls aged nine to 13 manage issues in low self-worth. Sarah intends to start a website to write a blog to help young girls appreciate their own beauty and to make good decisions based upon respect for themselves.

The second example is Trent, the author’s son. Trent is an adult in his 30s with autism and has a greater need for supports to maintain a job. He had Customized Employment supports which offered him job effectiveness. These customized supports led to his success for 11 years as an employee at Meijer Retail. Throughout the years he worked in numerous departments: Lawn and Garden, Pets, and as Clerk stocking products on shelves. The Customized Supports were:

- a. *Task reassignment, whereby the job description was negotiated based upon workplace needs and Trent’s needs.*
- b. *Job carving was applied to Trent’s capabilities and interests. For*

example, he cleaned cages, cared for, and fed the gerbils and birds. Yet, he was not responsible for the entire Pet Department job description.

- c. *Job sharing: Trent and his caregiver Jason were both hired as a team. They worked the same hours and Trent had his support when needed. Each shared the tasks and responsibilities of the job based on each other’s strengths.*



WORKING IT OUT: This video of Jackie Marquette’s son Trent demonstrates how he was provided natural supports to manage the enjoyment of working part time at Meijer, Inc. www.youtube.com/watch?v=CeNL_dKL5dE

The S.A.F.E.T.Y model, designed by the author, provides career education, job options that matches an individual’s strengths, planning, and strength development for on-the-job effectiveness for students and adults with developmental disabilities. The acronym means:

- S.** MSCI assessment for Strength Recognition: hard skills, self-expression, personal preferences, and self-emotional (177 items).
- A.** Awareness.
- F.** Fostering adaptation through Power Practices.
- E.** Creating ease and capabilities.
- T.** Transforming young adults and
- Y.** Youth with ASD and developmental disabilities into employees with “Work Effectiveness”

Marquette discovered essential findings from her research over the past decade with young adults with autism and their parents. Two findings emerged that were significantly beneficial for an individual with autism to have work effectiveness and to maintain and enjoy the job.

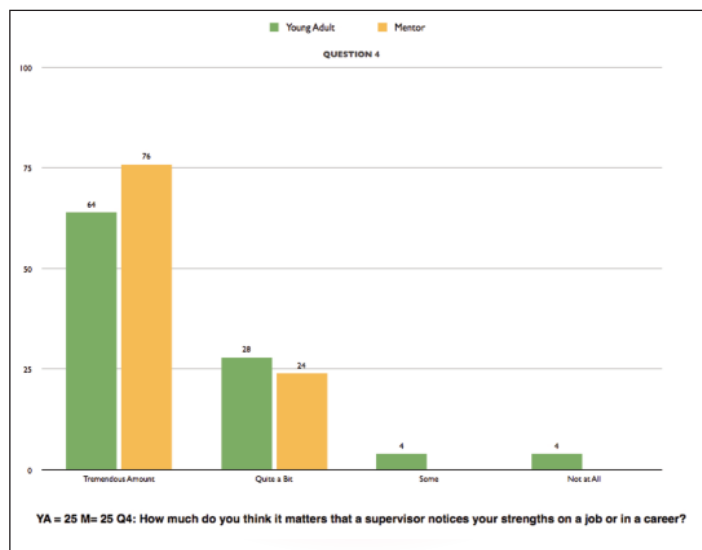
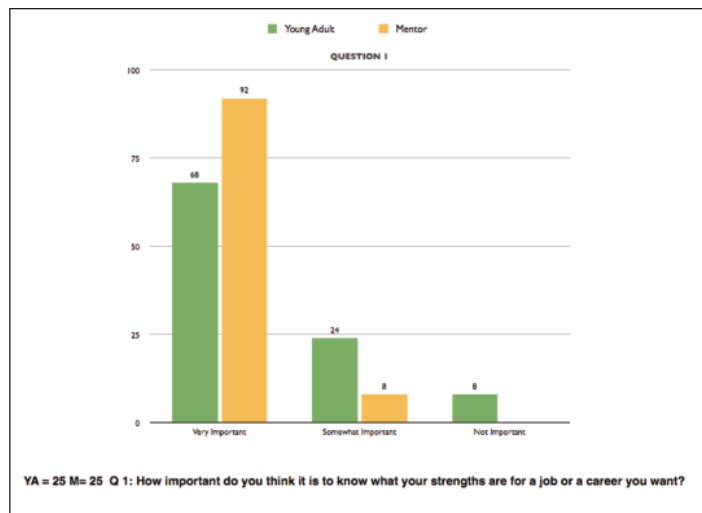
The first is creating “predictability.” When the individual has “predictability” within settings of uncertainty, it can be an anchor of support, reducing anxiety, and promoting ease and capability. There are many strategies, but two examples include: the individual operates off of a task checklist or a time schedule. The second key is the use of the Discovery Process (DP). DP has been used since the 80s for the design of a good job match and expanded to other areas in the S.A.F.E.T.Y model.

The S.A.F.E.T.Y model takes the Discovery Process (DP) to deeper areas of strength recognition. For example, it is suggested to use the DP with the student ages 14 to 21 to engage in career exploration, hands-on job shadowing and job tryouts for the design of a career portfolio. Equally important, the DP can foster the development of self-emotional awareness for outcomes of increased work effectiveness. Stevenson and Fowler (2016) suggest that professionals in

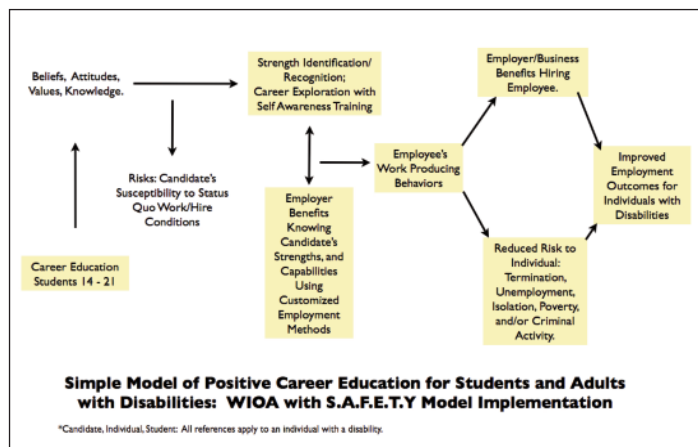
agencies and school become familiar and use the discovery process on behalf of students with disabilities.

Can students with disabilities recognize their strengths? A special education director once commented that her high school students with autism could not name their own strengths on their own. It may be very difficult to pull out of one's mind, specific strengths, especially when students lack self-worth. However, when students were offered a list of strengths and asked to check the items that are 'most like them', it became possible.

Let's examine what young adults and their advocates say about their strengths? For example, a small independent pilot study was conducted with 25 individuals with a developmental disability aged 18 to 28, and 25 individuals who were either a parent or an advocate to the young adult. The question was: "Can Individuals with autism and other health impairments identify their strengths?" The young adult and his/her parent/advocate participated in taking the MSCI, selecting strengths (Marquette, 2016). After taking the MSCI, the participants completed a rating scale of 12 questions. Of the 12, two are shown here. These young adults were able to recognize their own strengths (*See tables below*).



Also provided is a model to express the benefits of WIOA and the implementation of the S.A.F.E.T.Y model to meet youth and adult with disabilities needs who are job seekers.



In conclusion, the new law Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) gives us a reason to celebrate new integrated employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities, including those who have significant disabilities. Using the S.A.F.E.T.Y model, youth can select their strengths, discover job options that match their strengths, and prepare through career exploration and self-awareness development in order to adapt into work effectiveness.

The MSCI is *informal, individualized, and in depth*. There is no score, thus, no comparisons are made, no set criteria for the individual to overcome in order to be a job candidate. Everyone is winner. Yet, there are next steps for career exploration, discovery, emotional and self-development. "Findings provide superable data utilized for career decisions" (Pat M., IND Teacher/Specialist) •

Are you interested in taking the MSCI for identifying strengths? Receive a list of the individual's strengths and work/career options that match strengths. Go to www.marquettestrengthsindex.com and enter coupon code: EPMAG50 for 50% discount.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Jackie Marquette Ph.D. is dedicated to bringing innovative and unique solution based career tools and leadership to organizations and individuals with autism and all disabilities. Dr. Jackie provides consultation, writes, and conducts her own research. She has a son with autism in his 30s who is an accomplished award winning artist. Visit www.marquettestrengthsindex.com

References

Council of Chief State School Officers (2014). Opportunities and Options: Making Career Preparation Work for Students. Retrieved from http://www.ccsso.org/resources/programs/career_readiness_initiative.html

Marquette, J.M. (2016). Increase Transition Effectiveness for Students with Autism and Developmental Disabilities through Strength Identification Using The Marquette Strengths and Career Index (MSCI). Manuscript in preparation.

Stevenson, B.S. & Fowler C.H. (2016) Collaborative Assessment for Employment Planning: Transition Assessment and the Discovery Process. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 39, 57-62.

The National Disability Institute, The LEAD Center. (2015). How the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) & Local American Job Centers (AJCs) Can Support Employment Outcomes. Retrieved from: <http://www.leadcenter.org/system/files/resource/downloadableversionSuccessfulEmploymentHowLocalAJCsCanHelp0.pdf>

U.S. Department of Labor. (2014). TED: Youth Employment and Unemployment, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

WIOA Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (2014). PL 113129.