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## DOR Awareness

Shannon Mortela  
*California State University, Monterey Bay*

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Shannon Mortela

Department of Rehabilitation Larry Bounds - Duane Bradford

Collaborative Health & Human Services

Department of Health Human Services and Public Policy

California State University Monterey Bay

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#### Author Note

Shannon Mortela, Department of Health Human Services and Public Policy, California State University Monterey Bay. This research was supported by the Department of Rehabilitation. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Shannon Mortela, California State University Monterey Bay, 100 Campus Center, Seaside, CA, 93955. Contact: [smortela@csumb.edu](mailto:smortela@csumb.edu).

### **Abstract**

Millions of adults with disabilities need better job opportunities or career advancements. The California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) provides services for developing job training, achieving diplomas or degrees, assists with resume writing or interview skills, and support with a job coach. This department provides life changing skills that promote self-sufficiency and independence. Bringing awareness to the rehabilitation services will help to reduce stigma and increase civic engagement for people with disabilities by increasing autonomy and self-esteem. Each year the DOR celebrates National Disabilities Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM). The Roundtable discussion will go virtual for the first time and will bring together individuals to help gain employment for consumers with disabilities. This year's theme was increasing access and opportunity to emphasize the essential role that individuals with disabilities play in America's economic success. This year's event was a discussion detailing how continued advances in services are making it easier than ever to hire individuals with disabilities in high-demand jobs. Augmentation in independents or increasing physical abilities or social skills through employment may lead to a healthier life. Not only through monetary gain, health insurance benefits but also through stimulation from social engagement with peers. The annual NDEAM Roundtable discussion is an important event for the community and it is recommended to implement a dual (virtual and live) conference every year.

*Keywords:* Disabilities, employment, opportunity, autonomy

### **Agency & Communities Served**

The Department of Rehabilitation is federally funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). The RSA holds accountability measures under the Disability Act of 1973 and the WIOA amendment in 2014 for federal policies and guidelines. The DOR is the highest recipient of these funds annually. California has eighty-five field offices where they identify and coordinate services necessary to enable eligible clients to find employment, receive job training or customized employment, and post-secondary education for people with disabilities. The mission statement is, “The DOR works in partnership with consumers and other stakeholders to provide services and advocacy resulting in employment, independent living, and equality for individuals with disabilities” (DOR, 2020, Pg. 1). Their core values in which they operate all programs and services is quality, respect, integrity, openness, and accountability. In addition, guiding principles allow for them to deliver effective vocational rehabilitation services (VR), attract and retain a motivated workforce, maintain public trust by ensuring quality programs and services, and inspire hope in those served. For the fiscal year of 2018-2019, in California 108,916 individuals with disabilities received services.

The consumer will obtain a counselor to determine needs and abilities through eligibility and assessment. To qualify an individual must have a physical or mental impairment that substantially impedes the ability to secure employment or VR services, and must be able to benefit from DOR services in an employment outcome. The consumer must be an active participant in all requirements of the process including orientation, medical history evaluation, skills and capabilities review, and other actions. As an active participant the consumer must obtain and deliver all documentation needed, learn and understand the VR process, keep

appointments and be on time, and follow through and complete action agreed upon with the counselor. Based upon the client's disability limits of the six general areas of functioning: communication, mobility, interpersonal skills, self-care, work tolerance, and work skills the counselor will develop a needs assessment to discuss abilities and capabilities to determine the services and assistance the client will need to get or keep a job.

### **Problem Description**

Too few people with disabilities are aware of the Department of Rehabilitations services. Individuals with disabilities should be able to have access to all available resources in order to sustain a quality of life. The DOR has contracts with vendors through-out the community and can provide information and referrals to community members with disabilities. Vendors such as the San Andreas Regional Center (SARC) which provides behavioral and respite services, Independent Living services that provide housing with or without nursing assistance and technological devices for impairments, HOPE Services which provides job coaching and community service exploration, and Esperanza which provides mental and emotional health services. In addition to these the DOR can provide food, clothing, and legal assistance amongst other areas to consumers. These services are viable tools that are necessary for some consumers to live their daily lives and not having correct or no information can make it very difficult for people with disabilities (DOR, 2020). The DOR needs to find alternative ways to reach potential clients within the community.

**Contributing Factors**

Barriers to benefits of services are focused on the lack of culturally appropriate intervention outreach services. The lack of diverse linguistics by service professionals and the ability to connect through outreach to different communities within each city, make participation from clients arduous. These are obstacles in obtaining information about available resources and providing inclusion for people with disabilities.

People with disabilities who are also from diverse cultures are significantly hampered in realizing outcomes of full participation in all aspects of society due to a host of barriers to the benefits of civil and human rights. A small but growing body of research on this issue indicates that barriers include the lack of culturally appropriate outreach, language and communication barriers, attitudinal barriers, and the shortage of individuals from diverse cultures in the disability services professions. While strategies for reaching out to people with disabilities exist, research-based evidence is sparse regarding interventions aimed at eliminating barriers. Even more scant is research on outreach as a compelling strategy and its degree of efficacy in engaging people from diverse cultures and ultimately, improving outcomes. (NCD, 2003, pg. 1)

Interventions through outreach are designed to improve services to underserved groups but it is very difficult to track and measure. Outreach is a method of health education and service delivery. Like other health interventions it aims to promote healthy behavior by increasing awareness, encouraging engagement and change, and sustaining well-being of target populations outside of agencies. Thereby, seeking individuals and encouraging participation in existing services for those not effectively reached by existing interventions.

The lack of outreach has a critical impact on what consumers can obtain, where they can access goods and services, and how they can obtain them. Outreach through the DOR includes a government website where a client can get stats and location of local offices, social media accounts with Facebook that has 6,096 followers, Twitter with 2,127, Instagram has 1,620 and a LinkedIn page 2,116 followers. These are all great tools for disseminating current information to modern society and younger generations.

Another contributing factor is stigma regarding disabilities not only in the U.S but around the world. In an expansion of workplace civil rights, the 1990 Americans with Disability Act (ADA) extended anti-discrimination protection to individuals with “mental impairments.” One of the most critical barriers to the employment of individuals with mental disabilities is the degree of social stigma such disabilities incur, and there is compelling evidence that employers have stigmatizing attitudes and have discriminated against those with mental disabilities” (Scheid, 2005).

“People with disabilities have been stigmatized throughout history. In many cultures, disability has been associated with curses, disease, dependence, and helplessness. Disability stigma can play out in a number of ways, including: social avoidance, stereotyping, discrimination, condensation, blaming, internalization, hate crimes and violence” (agerrtc, n.d, pg.1). Some people may leave them out of social activities or become more distant after they develop a disability, be hesitant to make eye contact or start conversations. People may presume them to be helpless, unable to care for themselves, or make their own decisions. People with one disability, such as speech impairment, may be presumed to have other disabilities they don't

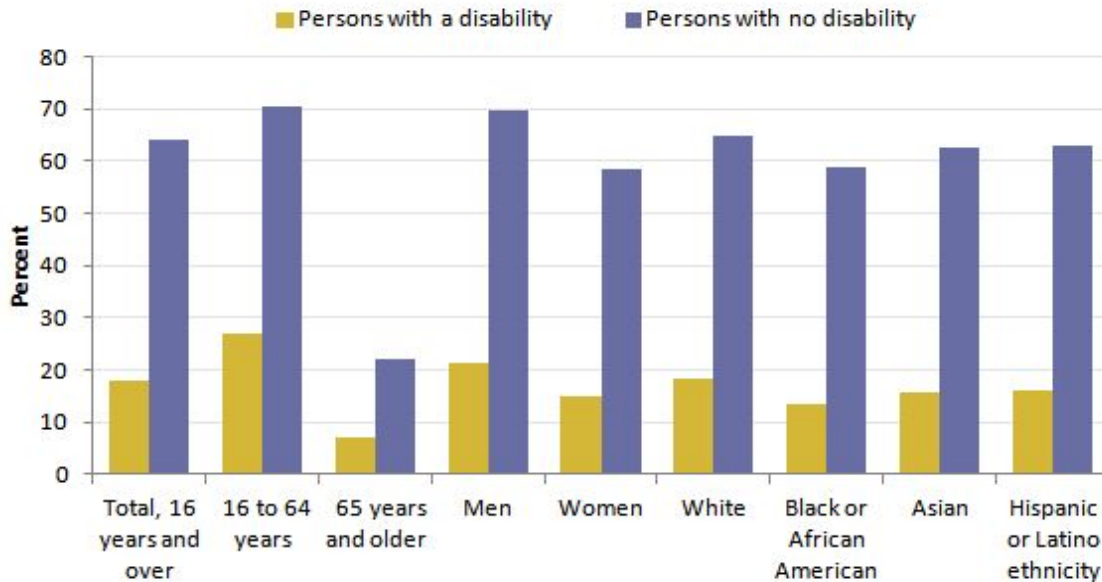
have, such as an intellectual disability. People with disabilities may be denied jobs, housing, or other opportunities due to false assumptions or stereotypes about disabilities. This still occurs today, despite disability rights laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). People with disabilities may be coddled or over-protected due to perceptions of their helplessness. People may be blamed for their disability, or accused of using their disability to gain unfair benefits. People with disabilities may themselves adopt negative beliefs about their disability and feel ashamed or embarrassed about it. People with disabilities may be targeted in hate crimes. In addition, they are more likely to be victims of physical or sexual violence than people without disabilities.

### **Consequences**

One consequence for not taking the initiative to bring awareness of DOR service is a, “cyclical process that occurs when people with disabilities experience unemployment; this unemployment often leads to chronic stress which in turns leads to negative mental health , symptoms that create further barriers to unemployment” ( Kerr, Dattilo, et. al, 2012, pg.1). According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics in 2019, the unemployment rate for persons with a disability was at 7.3 percent; persons with a disability are less likely to have completed a bachelor’s degree or higher than those with no disability; 32 percent of workers with a disability usually worked part time, compared with 17 percent of those without a disability; and less likely to work in management, professional, and related occupations than those without a disability (BLS, 2020, pg. 2-3).



**Employment-population ratio by disability status, age, sex, race, and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, 2012 annual averages**



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The need for job retention services in rehabilitation is clearly indicated in statistics on unemployment and job loss rates for people with disabilities. The DOR provides pre-employment skill training, career & post-secondary exploration, and work experience opportunities to people with disabilities. Therefore individuals with disabilities are more likely to retain employment when rehabilitation counselors provide retention services.

Another consequence that people with disabilities face when they are not civically engaged is depression and other mental health issues. Depression may be more common with persons with disabilities than the general population. Studies have shown that this is a risk factor for those with disabilities.

Physical disability is found to be related to depressive symptoms. People with physical disability experience multiple risk factors for depressive symptoms, including stereotypic social and personal attitude; abuse; loss of roles; and stressors related to poverty, environmental barriers, and/ or lack of access to appropriate health care. Substantial evidence shows that people living with physical disabilities are at least three times more likely to experience depression compared to the general population. (NCBI, 2016)

People with disabilities often experience a sense of social isolation and loneliness, which can also lead to depression and other mental health issues. Inaccessible environments and misunderstanding from non-disabled individuals can sometimes lead to feeling left out, isolated or even shunned.

Recent research links loneliness to a number of other health concerns, including a greater risk for premature death, dementia and heart disease, as well as decreased immunity. The mental and physical impact of loneliness and isolation can be tremendous (Kohner, 2017).

### **Problem Model**

<b>Contributing Factors</b>	<b>Problem</b>	<b>Consequences</b>
Lack of outreach to potential consumers	Too few people with disabilities are aware of the Department of Rehabilitation services.	Unemployment
Stigma		Mental health issues

## **Capstone Project Description and Justification**

### **Capstone Project**

As part of an effort to bring awareness to the Department of Rehabilitation services for people with disabilities, collaboration is needed with community organizations. The NDEAM (National Disabilities Employment Awareness Month) Roundtable event takes place every October and is designed to start the conversation among the DOR, consumers, and employers, while highlighting their experiences in the workforce to help educate one another. Local companies expand on ideas on how to modify jobs so that employees who have disabilities can maintain productivity. Thus, giving talented individuals living with disabilities opportunities to join the workforce and businesses benefiting from their talent. The NDEAM is developed to increase awareness and participation for those not effectively reached by existing outreach efforts/interventions. This year's NDEAM Roundtable discussion was held on October 22, 2020 and is co-produced by the Workability III (WAIII) program of Gavilan Community College.

### **Project Purpose and Justification**

Bringing awareness to the rehabilitation services will help to reduce stigma and increase civic engagement for people with disabilities by increasing autonomy and self-esteem. Augmentation in independents or increasing physical abilities or social skills through employment may lead to a healthier life. Not only through monetary gain, health insurance benefits but also through stimulation from social engagement with peers. The DOR will encourage clients to explore training or educational options that will lead to long-term job opportunities. These opportunities begin at secondary school to explore job interests and career development options. Later, continued clients may attend a job training program, obtain

assistance from a job coach, open their own business or attend a college or university. All in which will help clients build skills to help them limit the challenges that impact their quality of life.

These focus groups can be implemented in working with people with learning disabilities, focus groups allow for collective observations to surface and for discussion to be built on and relevant issues or lines of inquiry explored. Focus groups also offer important opportunities for including traditionally excluded and marginalized individuals to voice their opinions and participate in service development decisions, although indirectly. They can: help people to gain confidence in a group environment; create safe, non threatening and non intimidating environments for user organization and discussion; provide for intermember reinforcement, peer support and validation of views and experiences; and enable members to participate in research from which they would otherwise be excluded due to poor literacy skills. Focus groups are therefore a potentially powerful tool for communicating experiences which would otherwise remain hidden or invisible: Used alone or in combination with other methods, the aim of focus groups is to get closer to participant's understanding of and perspectives on certain issues. (Cambridge and McCarthy, 2002)

The DOR offers resources through the outreach and collaboration that develops partnerships with youth educational, recreational, and community organizations that provides enhanced, coordinated vocational services, employment preparation, job development, supportive transitional services to employment. Providing outreach to the community for those

who are potential clients of the DOR is important because of many factors: during the transitions to help acquire knowledge and skills they need to maximize independence; connect them with programs, services, activities, information and support to help them make informed choices; offers career planning through Title 1 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA); having coordinated services can improve transition outcomes insuring a continuum of services across agencies; help navigate systems for low-skilled youth with disabilities to education and training credentials; manage the health care transition from child-centered to adult-centered medical care, the Affordable Care Act, and Medicaid; take charge of needs from professional service providers (FPT, 2016).

### **Project Implementation**

To implement this project research was done on the national NDEAM event, the involvement of the U.S Dept. of Labor and the Office of Disability Employment Policy to understand the history and how it impacts local community employers and employees living with disabilities. By keeping with the historical aspect we can continue to highlight disability-inclusion employment policy and contract compliance. It was important to emphasize in the Roundtable discussion how continued advances in services are making it easier to hire individuals with disabilities in high-demand jobs. Getting local agencies involved helped to make this event successful and bring about active participation. Obtaining a panel that include local business and job seekers, to speak on how successful the working partnerships have transpired. Sending out marketing materials to CSUMB departments and following up with RSVP's was an important step in bringing awareness to the DOR and the services they provide

to consumers. Furthermore, outreach through existing networks helped to establish new professional connections and may develop future services for consumers. Next, technological training was needed to learn how to moderate with team meetings, possibly record the event or provide closed captions or a translator for attendees who have other accessibility needs. Lastly, created a feedback survey for the event, to gain important information as to if the consumer or employer gained information, became informed, has further questions, needs more information, or would like to talk to a counselor.

The event should have a clear objective, be useful to the audience, be well rehearsed, have clear contact information, and a call to action or a way for consumers to take the next step. After the Roundtable discussion/meeting it was important to analyze the feedback to make alterations or modification to enhance the events experience. The consumer's feedback is an important tool to create future advancements in workforce recruitment, engage listeners and enable them to seek resources. This intern helped create recommendations for future in person or web-based events that can be utilized by new councilors for new DOR consumers. A detailed implementation plan and timeline can be seen in the Scope of Work in Appendix A.

### **Assessment Plan and Expected Outcomes**

During the shelter-in-place state regulations measuring outcomes was done by disseminating marketing material to bring about awareness to DOR services. Success rates can assist in planning a project and help to facilitate expected outcomes. Once able to return to the DOR, effectiveness will be measured through increased client applications and client completion of the employment program with a career. Community outreach involves seeking potential consumers through local schools, universities and recreation facilities or having them be referred

to the DOR. Once enrolled and committed to the employment program consumers will develop skills needed to obtain employment. A successful outcome will be determined by the percentage of attendees, to those who were invited to those who attended and a suggestion survey. For this event we sent out 100 invitations and received a 55% attendance turnout, which was our hope. The COVID-19 shelter in-place did not hinder presence, it may have made it more convenient for persons with mobility disabilities to attend. The survey allowed for suggestions on how to improve, for future Roundtable events and was sent out to the 55 participants and received a 20% response. Having this data will provide the DOR if outreach needs to be expanded and give valuable feedback from consumers/employers. In addition insight as to, if information and awareness of services were attained through this event.

### **Project Results**

The Roundtable discussion received 100% satisfaction for being useful. From the survey data question "How was is useful" respondents found the meeting informative and insightful, helped to promote inclusiveness and collaboration between locals, clarified roles at the DOR, and heard how employer, community organizations and state agencies are working together to increase competitive integrated employment.

Additional topics respondents would like to see offered are other professional insights, consumer feedback on DOR services and success stories, topics on housing and vocational programs, job coaching resources, the use of evidence-based intervention in VR services, the utility of virtual job searches, information on disclosure of disabilities to employers, and accommodations in the workplace.

Lastly, respondents also had a chance to remark on the overall delivery of the Roundtable discussion and many believed the google zoom platform worked well and ran smoothly. Some believed the virtual format enabled more people to participate and attend this year's meeting. One felt a webinar style might allow for more engagement, the survey should be sent out sooner, and closed caption availability for hearing difficulties through online connections, should be clarified.

### **Conclusion & Recommendations**

In conclusion, the project was successful. The DOR celebrates National Disabilities Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) along with other organizations all over the United State. This is the first year the DOR was forced to have a virtual event due to the rise of COVID-19 cases in California. There was no way of predicting the attendance outcome for this was uncharted territory. The platform utilized to do outreach was determined based on whether or not it was closed caption accessible. They ended up using Zoom meetings which enabled them to view individuals and they spoke and gave everyone a chance to ask questions through a chat box, which gave attendees a chance to inquire about topics as presented. It has been recommended to continue having this annual discussion in person but also having a large screen for virtual attendees. The attendees were all attentive and eager to participate which made the two hour meeting go by rather fast. Engagement was planned from specified employers and DOR consumers who gained successful employment. It would be helpful in the future to utilize recommendations from successful meetings, as we promote virtual employment opportunities.



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**Appendix A****Scope of Work**

Activities	Timeline/Deadlines	Supporting Staff
Do research on NDEAM events	August 2020	Sean Richardson Duane Bradford
Attend agenda meetings	August 2020	Sean Richardson Duane Bradford
Get NDEAM event approved	September 2020	Duane
Assists with Zoom platform	September 2020	Sean Richardson Duane Bradford
Enlist employers/employee for event	October 2020	Sean Richardson Duane Bradford
Determine accessibility needs -transcripts, captions, translator	October 2020	Sean Richardson Duane Bradford
Assist with certificates for presenters	October 2020	Sean Richardson Duane Bradford
Send out marketing for event	October 2020	Sean Richardson Duane Bradford
Send out release of information documents	October 2020	Sean Richardson Duane Bradford
Obtain biographies for event	October 2020	Sean Richardson Duane Bradford
Event	October 2020	Sean Richardson Duane Bradford
Create recommendations for future presentations	November 2020	Sean Richardson Duane Bradford