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Individuals with Disabilities Struggle to get Employment

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Abstract

The California Department of Rehabilitation at the Gilroy branch office of the San Jose District focuses on providing services in employment readiness and success for the disability community. Historically, members of the disability community experience higher levels of unemployment rates due to their disabilities. The contributing factors are the poor connection to appropriate services and discrimination at work. Their lack of social acceptance results in individuals having lower self-esteem and less motivation to seek employment or locate resources to fulfill their employment needs. This capstone project consisted of a program evaluation survey of former consumers' regarding program success and counselor effectiveness. The intern and mentor created the survey and distributed the surveys to the counselors to pass to consumers. The completed surveys indicated that consumers were satisfied with the employment readiness support. Therefore, the recommendation for the agency is to evaluate counselor effectiveness every six months to monitor success.

Keywords: Keywords: Department of Rehabilitation, disability community, counselor effectiveness, poor connections, stigma.

Agency and Communities Served

The California Department of Rehabilitation, commonly known as the DOR, is a state agency that provides vocational rehabilitation programs to individuals with disabilities. Interning in the San Jose District of the DOR in the Gilroy office provides services to Santa Clara areas such as Morgan Hill, Gilroy, and San Benito County. The mission statement is as follows, the California Department of Rehabilitation provides services and advocacy to consumers and stockholders resulting in employment, independent living, and equality for individuals with disabilities (Corada, n.d.). "The vision statement is employment, independence and equality for all Californians with disabilities" (Corada, n.d.). The Department of Rehabilitation programs that my project implemented in was supported employment programs, student services, and vocational rehabilitation services.

Problem Description

Problem Definition

Individuals with a disability have been discouraged for many decades, especially in the workforce setting. The lives of the disability community are challenging as it is, and it gets more complicated as they try to get into the workforce setting. As the year's progress, the disability community continues to experience high unemployment rates. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2021) reported that over 12% of people with disabilities were unemployed in 2020, a 5.3 point increase from 2019. As the percentages of the disability community rise, it also decreases their chance of getting employment. The negative aspect of the disability community can lead them not to want to work and stay home or become homeless.

The lack of resources that the disability community has for their chance to increase employment is slight. Not doing outreach in the correct services can cause the disability

community to find employment. As a result, the population is at greater risk of becoming discriminated against at work. Bonaccio and others (2019) state that in the United States, one in three (34.9%) individuals with disabilities are employed, while 76% of others without disabilities, and disparity will increase. Finding a job can be extremely difficult without the proper resources that the disability community can benefit from. As a result, the impact of the negative consequences becomes another issue to be addressed.

Contributing Factors

Poor Connection to Appropriate Services

The disability community struggles to get the proper resources to succeed in life. In contrast, the resources available can be hidden and hard to find; they need to go above and beyond to find the right resource to help find employment. One agency that provides goods and services to the disability community is the California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR). In the report conducted by Joe Xavier (2018-2020), the DOR director states that stakeholders and DOR staff identified delays in services due to the difficulty of the hiring process and maintaining sufficient staff to meet California request services. When an individual with a disability goes to find employment, companies do not want to hire them because they do not want to deal with their disabilities. For example, the reason they look, how they act, and their type of disability makes them believe that it will create a bad reputation for the company. The World Health Organization (2021) services have limited understatement and information on the rights of the disability community, health, and inadequate professional development training for the disability. Most of the time, companies do not know how to act or treat individuals with disabilities. Not having trained staff can make the disability community despair from the workforce.

Discriminated at Work

Individuals with disabilities have a high percentage of being discriminated against at work; some challenges come from the hiring process and throughout their employment. According to Workplace Fairness (n.d.), discrimination toward disability can happen through direct discrimination, indirect, unfair reasonable adjustment, and harassment. Discrimination can happen in different ways for the disability community. Some are easier to detect, and others can be difficult to know if they are discriminated against. Harris and Gould (2019), a study result of the mock interview, showed that disabilities received 26% less employer interest than those without disabilities. Since individuals disclose that they have a disability, they are less likely to be employed in a professional setting. As a result, the disability community struggles to find employment, and after obtaining employment, they are discriminated against by workers. Masango (2018) mentions that disability faces problems such as accommodations at work, access to public transportation, and ignorance at work. Disability employees are judged for their disability that is not seen as capable.

Consequences

Continued Stigma

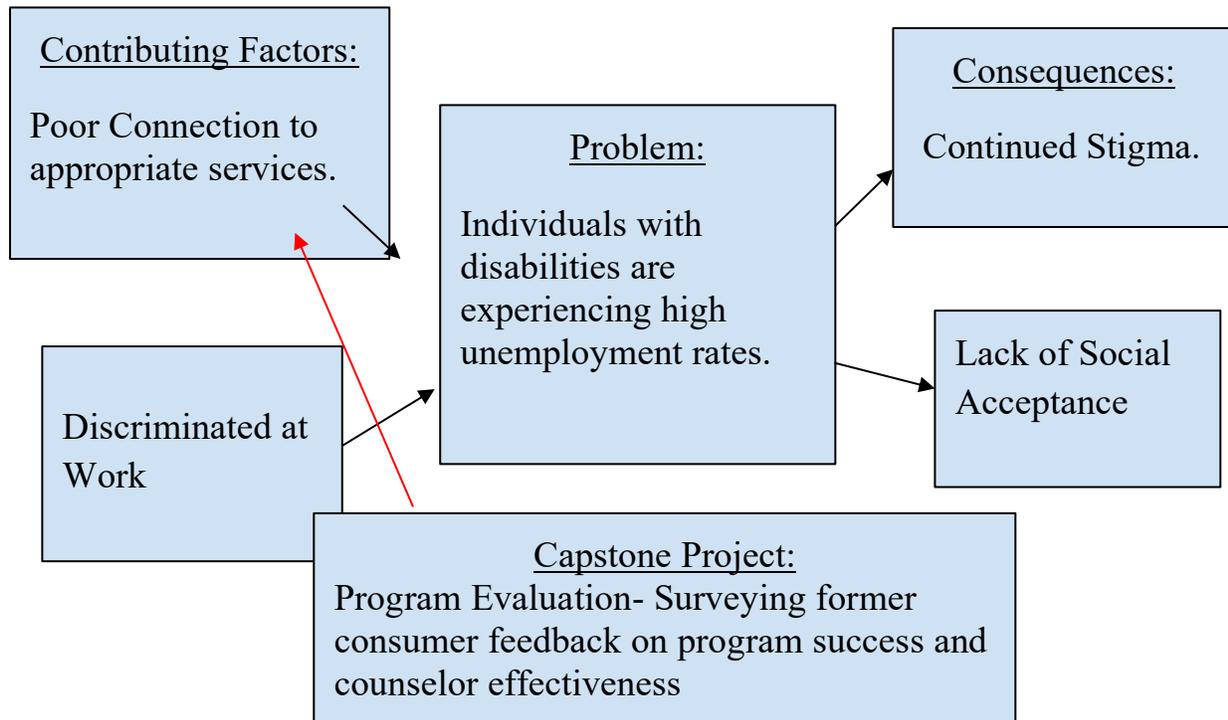
With the disability community being pre-judged of their abilities, they are often put down into a category of stigma in employment; the disability community is easily discouraged and is seen as incapable of the task given. Walsh (2021) notes that employers underestimate the depth of talent and potential benefits the disability can bring to the workforce. The stigma around the disability can lead them to be seen as incapable of their work performance. According to Workplace Fairness (n.d.), discrimination toward disability can happen through direct discrimination, indirect, unfair reasonable adjustment, and harassment. Although agencies with

resources provide supported employment opportunities, there could be a stigma in the agency's name. Harris and Gould (2019) note that stigmatizing attitudes has caused disabled individuals to be negatively affected in their hiring process, denied promotions, and treated unfairly by other coworkers. Getting constant stigma from society can affect the disability community by lowering their self-esteem. If the individuals are stigmatized, it can lower their chance to make connections with other coworkers and not have the chance to be promoted. The University of Washington (2016) states that people with disabilities are labeled helpless, not independent, or cannot make their own decisions.

Lack of Social Acceptance

As mentioned, the disability community is discouraged from employment, yet they are not accepted in society and the workforce. Having less opportunity to have authority in working areas makes the individuals feel less social acceptance. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) individuals with disability go through multiple barriers, such as attitudinal, communication, physical, policy, programmatic, social, and transportation. These barriers make the disability community not feel social acceptance because their employer can promise a new policy but never put it into place. As a result, individuals with disabilities “indicate that they had experienced negative bias in the workplace such as feeling underestimated, insulted, excluded, or had coworkers appear uncomfortable because of their disability” (Harris & Gould, 2019). Prejudgment of the disability community underestimates their self-esteem causing the person to feel incapable of doing assignments on their own. Being accepted and understanding their disability can be challenging because they view the individuals as impaired in completing assignments by themselves.

Problem Model Diagram



Capstone Project Description

To know if the Department of Rehabilitation is helping the disability community, I will conduct a program evaluation by creating surveys to collect consumer feedback on the program's success and counselor effectiveness. The project explores poor connections to appropriate services if it affects the disability community to meet their employment goal. The project will address the issue of individuals with disabilities experiencing high unemployment rates. The survey will allow data to be collected to fully understand if the program is helping the disability community find employment. Also, it will indicate if the counselors are providing the best resources and whether the individuals are taking advantage of the resources given to them. Annie Cole (2020) mentions in an article that the purpose of a program evaluation is to evaluate the performance and value of the program by having three outcomes, which are "assessing program

implementation, assessing program results, and highlighting methods of program improvement" (Cole, 2020). The program evaluation survey will be helpful for the agency since it will determine what is working and not working for the Department of Rehabilitation to provide the best services possible. The goal is to continue using the survey after each former consumer to collect the data and improve any area that needs improvement.

Project Justification

The methodology in the project has taken outstanding and excellent results by gaining and evaluating the data. Consumers were given a survey in which they wrote down their answers regarding the effectiveness they had with the counselor and the impact the DOR had on their employment process and the services provided. The project is standard through experience and testing since each consumer answered with their opinions and truthfulness. The data collected was sent out to the counselor, and when received, it was printed and handed to me. Unfortunately, the Department of Rehabilitation is not up to date with online forms for consumers' to fill out online. Nevertheless, the techniques have supplied the project with reliable data and desired results.

Project Description & Implementation Process

Project Implementation

Implementing the project took different steps. The first step was researching how many consumers had close files that I would be able to send them the surveys about a program evaluation. The next step would be to create a program evaluation survey and go over it with my mentor for approval. Next, I communicated with the counselors regarding the survey's purpose and the support I would need from them. Lastly, I would send out the surveys and analyze the program outcomes using the surveys as a reference. Once the data was collected, I collaborated

with my mentor on the agency's outcomes. I then organized the response that was sent back and created an excel sheet where it would show the results of the project.

Assessment Plan

The data collected will be organized in an excel sheet that will be created to show statistics on how well consumers think they are benefiting from counselor support in that Gilroy branch office. The surveys will be typed and sent through email to counselors to forward the survey to former Department of Rehabilitation consumers. The excel sheet used to collect data will have the questions regarding gender, age, and how the individuals heard about the California Department of Rehabilitation. Through the data gathered, the program outcome and desired goals are to find the effectiveness of the counselor's support regarding the services provided to the consumer. The use of excel sheets and graphs will help me measure the assessment plan outcomes for the capstone project's success.

Expected Outcomes

The project's expected outcome is to determine counselors' impact on consumers through surveys. The student intern and mentor will collect the data before April 26, 2022. Increasing counselors' knowledge of their ability to provide the services will guide them to become more knowledgeable about the service and its effectiveness. With the survey responses, counselors will understand the pros and cons when providing services for the consumers. Understanding the positives and negatives can help adjust and increase their professional performance. Therefore, the project will allow counselors to be aware of the services provided to the consumers and their effectiveness.

Project Results

The result of the survey of the Department of Rehabilitation former consumers revealed and confirmed that the Department of Rehabilitation is providing adequate services and that counselors are providing the proper support and resources for the disability community. The survey responses were all collected with positive results. Due to the time frame, the number of surveys sent back was less than expected, but we received two survey responses. It is challenging to get surveys back since most of the information is confidential and requires a consent form for me to send the survey to the consumer.

While I was not able to send out the surveys, I had to rely on the counselor to be able to conduct the project. I would constantly send reminders to the counselors to send out the survey, but some were unable to get any responses back from the former consumer. The survey had to be in a paper form format because not every individual can fill out the survey online using a survey data system like survey monkey. A paper form format and mail system is something that the Department of Rehabilitation has been operating for many years. Up to now, it has been working correctly for some individuals with a disability.

Attached are the participants' results.

Table 1.

Gender Responses

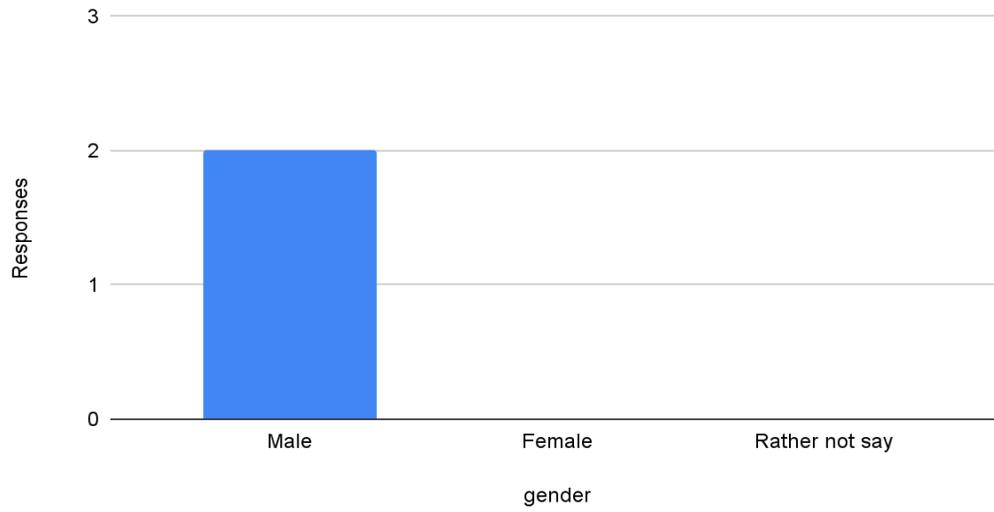


Table 2.

What is your age?

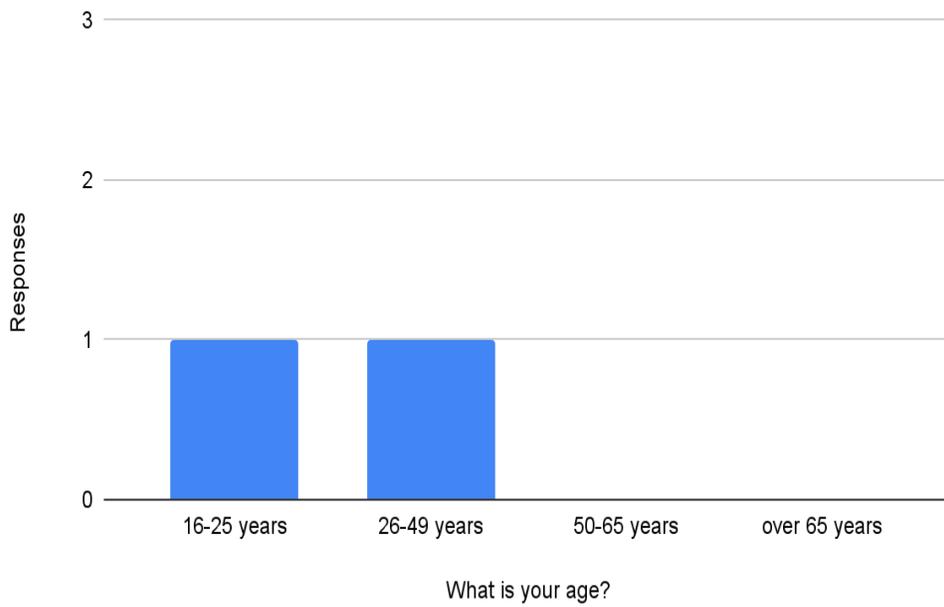


Table 3.

How did you hear about us?

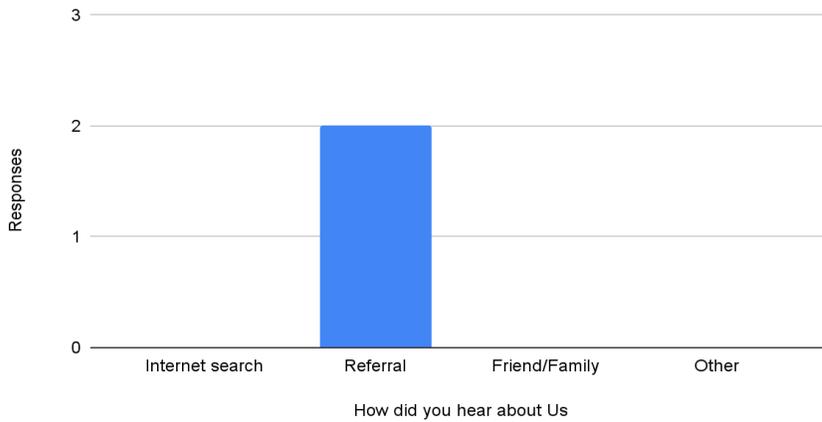
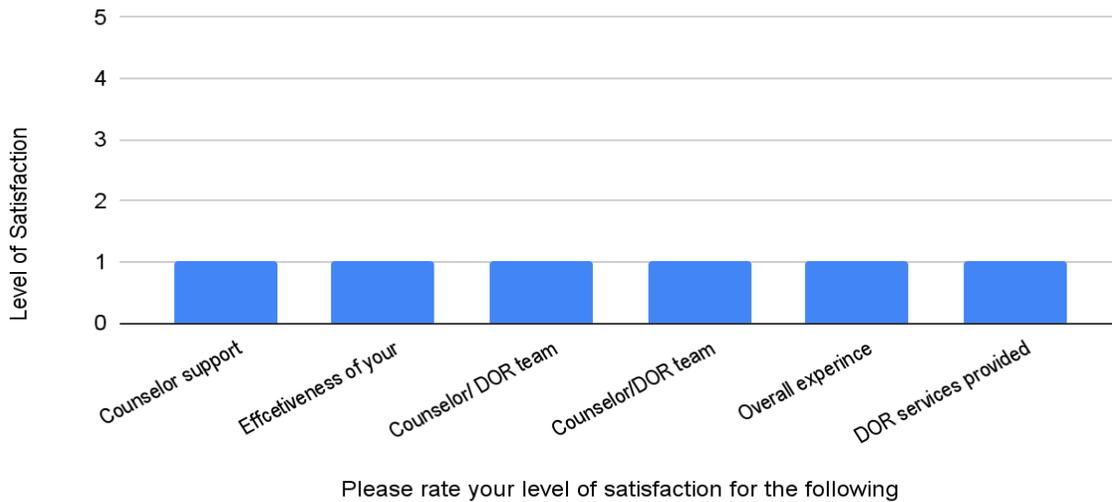


Table 4.

Please rate your level of satisfaction for the following with 1 being very satisfied to 5 being very dissatisfied



Both participants were delighted with the overall questions asked in table 4. One participant added a comment stating that the Gilroy office helped with his anxiety, which helped him become a very good student and supported his accomplishments. Another question that I asked was, "Are there any improvements you can suggest to best improve the DOR service?"

The responses were positive. One states that having more online electronic applications would benefit the application process. I asked the second to last question: "Any other information you would like to share with us?". The responses were also positive and showed gratitude towards the staff and organization. The last question in the survey was, "Would you recommend the DOR services to other persons with disabilities who want to become employed? If so, why?". The responses from both participants were yes; they would recommend the DOR services to others due to the support and guidance they received.

Conclusion & Recommendations

After researching the disability community, obtaining the data, and working closely with the counselors that provide support and services for the disability community, I can conclude that the counselors impact the consumer's employment goal. The survey responses show that the Department of Rehabilitation former consumers that came in without employment could obtain employment when they were seeking the services from the Department of Rehabilitation. Although employment can be challenging for the disability community to achieve, the Department of Rehabilitation services can help the chance of employment for the disability community. The project research is completed due to the data that was collected. The recommendations that I would give to the agency would have a self-evaluation of the counselor's effectiveness and the consumer within the timeframe of every six months. Doing program evaluations will help the consumers know they will get the correct services and guidance.

Personal Reflection

The experience that I had interned with the Department of Rehabilitation helped me gain more knowledge about professional communication and working in teams. After working with a

counselor and mentor, I learned that a critical aspect of the social work field is that working in teams can help you have a smoother day. Working with the disability community is something that I advocate for because we all need additional support and guidance to meet our goals.

Serving and supporting the disability community has an integral part of my heart and knowing that I once was guided through the Department of Rehabilitation services is meaningful. Being a former consumer of the Department of Rehabilitation and now helping other individuals in my situation brings me passion and motivation to continue advocating for the disability community.

Understanding the Department of Rehabilitation system and interacting with the staff allowed me to see how much hard work and dedication everyone brings to the table. I am honored to have the opportunity to intern where I once was a former consumer.

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Appendix A

Scope of Work

<i>Program Evaluation: Survey Questionnaire</i>				
	<i>Natalia Cuna</i>			
Task	Timeline	Parties Involved	Materials/Services Needed	Completed Product
Discuss capstone project with mentor	Jan. 24- Jan. 28, 2022	Natalia & Mentor	Computer	Jan. 25, 2022
Brainstorm and develop questions for the survey	Feb. 21 - Feb. 28, 2022	Natalia, Mentor, & Service coordinator	Paper and computer	Fed. 25, 2022
Review brainstorm survey questions mentor	Feb. 28 - Mar. 4, 2022	Natalia & Mentor	Paper and computer	Mar. 1, 2022
Finalize survey questions with mentor	Mar. 7 - Mar. 11, 2022	Natalia & Mentor	computer	Mar. 8, 2022
Create and finalize survey	Mar. 14 - Mar. 18, 2022	Natalia and Mentor	computer and printer	Mar. 15, 2022
Communicated by email with counselor and mentor regarding survey's purpose and support	Mar. 21 - Mar. 25, 2022	Natalia, Mentor, & Counselor's	computer and email	Mar. 22, 2022
Counselor's sent surveys to former consumers from the Vocational Rehabilitation contract and to Pre-Employment Student Service contract.	Mar. 21 - Apr. 28, 2022	Natalia, mentor, & school	Paper survey inside envelope, computer, printer, and email	Apr. 19, 2022
Collect and evaluate data	Apr. 25 - Apr. 29, 2022	Natalia & Mentor	paper and computer	Apr. 26, 2022
Complete report requirements	May 2, 2022	Natalia & Mentor	computer	May 2, 2022

California Department of Rehabilitation Gilroy Branch Office
Program Evaluation

The Gilroy DOR office is always looking for feedback on how well it is doing in providing counseling support and services to individuals living with disabilities. One of the best ways to know how we are doing is to get your feedback on the services we have provided you in your efforts to reach your employment goal. The information collected will remain confidential. We look forward to receiving your feedback. In your own words, please answer the following questions and return in the enclosed envelope.

1. Your gender: ___ Female ___ Male ___ Rather not say
2. What is your age? (check box)
 - 16-25 years 50-65 years
 - 26-49 years over 65 years
3. How did you hear about us? (check box)
 - Internet search
 - Referral
 - Friend/ Family
 - Other _____

4. Please rate your level of satisfaction for the following: (circle one)

	<i>Very Satisfied</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>OK</i>	<i>Dissatisfied</i>	<i>Very Dissatisfied</i>
a. Counselor support	1	2	3	4	5
b. Effectiveness of your counselor	1	2	3	4	5
c. Counselor/DOR team responded promptly to my questions and requests.	1	2	3	4	5
d. Counselor/DOR team helpfulness	1	2	3	4	5
e. Overall experience	1	2	3	4	5
f. DOR services provided	1	2	3	4	5

Comments: _____

5. Are there any improvements you can suggest to best improve the DOR services?

6. Any other information you would like to share with us?

7. Would you recommend the DOR services to other persons with disabilities who want to become employed? If so, why?
