



Sheltered Employment, Sheltered Lives: *Family Perspectives of Conversion to Community-Based Employment*

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Vermont, USA

- Small, rural state with population of 624,000
- Developed Supported Employment programs in early 1980's
- Gradually converted sheltered workshops to community-based employment
- Last one (standout) successfully closed in 2002



Agency Background

- In 1967 group of concerned parents started their agency/sheltered workshop.
- Similar workshops around the country emerged in the 1950's-60's.
- Sanctuary away from the institution and a safe haven from the community.
- Sheltered workshop built and maintained on charity.
- Developed a close, insular community.



Study

- Decision to close sheltered workshop
- 35-year history of sheltered workshop
- Founding members remained involved
- Unique opportunity to observe the conversion process among families and participants



Data Collection

- Qualitative Case Study
- Interviews with Parents/Participants
 - Pre and Post
- Archive Review
- Participant Observation

Participants

Sheltered Workshop

- *Years in workshop:*
- Doris/Audrey: 32 years
- Julia/Ken: 31 years
- Lorna/Peter: 15 years
- Jan/Jake: 13 years
- Pamela/Sam: 4 years

Community Employment

- *Years in workshop:*
- Patty/Dana: 0 years
- Geraldine/Jim: 0 years
- Gwen/Mary: 0 years

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Paradigm Shift (1967-Now)

- Segregated
- Sheltered Work
- Mentally Retarded
- Uneducable
- Children
- Protected
- Parent-Determined
- Potential Untapped
- None/Spec. Ed.
- Older Parents
- Agency-Based
- Community Exclusion
- Included
- Supported Employment
- Intellectual Disability
- Having Competence
- Adults
- Dignity of Risk
- Self-Determined
- Potential Maximized
- Inclusive/Spec. Ed.
- Younger Parents
- Community-Based
- Community Acceptance





Family Voices (Concern)

- *A lot of the families down there are my age and older that started the workshop because at that time there were no other services. And so I think from that point of view it's a little scary for some of them to let go. They worked hard and did their job; they really spent a lot of time and effort to get that started and having a place for their family members to go and be protected and feel good about themselves.*



Family Voices (Anger)

- *Twenty-five years ago the “experts” said that the state institution was the way to go. Then the experts said it had to close and people went to foster homes instead of the family, because experts said that would be best. [My son] was physically and emotionally abused at that foster home. He starved himself to get out. He had always been good-natured, but became very unhappy and difficult. Talk about trials and tribulations! We weathered it all. They didn’t live up to their word.*



Family Voices (Fear)

- *We are all scared to death. My biggest concern is the far-reaching effect on their emotions of closing the workshop. I'm not sure about how she will feel not having that be a center for her. Whether it's a workshop where she really works or whether it's a place they can come and go. If they can just come back there and eat lunch so that they could see their own peers and belong, and feel that this is MY place.*



Community Employment Families

- *I don't like the thought of putting people in an area where they're not seen. They need to be appreciated by the community. People need to know that there are people with disabilities out there, not hiding away somewhere working on projects.*



Community Employment Families

- *I watch many of the people who were in the sheltered workshop and how they behave socially. I think maybe because they work in this closeted room or closeted box that they are in, that they don't have the opportunity to socialize and I think it comes out when you bring them to large groups of people. You see that.*



Community Employment Families

- *It's too reclusive. That's one of the things that I found about it too, you're shut off from the rest of the world. And it sort of adds to the stigma, which is sad.*



Life After Sheltered Work



MICHAEL MOODY WORKS ON A HEAT SINK ASSEMBLY
... he works at Champlain Sheltered Workshop

- “I’ve been making a lot of money. I’m happy.”





After the Closure

- *I think he's happy, what more can I ask for than to have him contented and happy?*
- *[Her] integration into the community has been a remarkable move up the ladder for her in skills. She is so verbal you would not believe it. You cannot close her down sometimes. And you know, before she went into the workshop situation, she wasn't speaking at all.*



Regret of Lost Potential

- *I think people are capable and I notice the younger kids these days are being prepared and educated for that. They're gaining a lot more skills. You see, [my son] wasn't.*
- *We didn't prepare them for this. The younger kids have the potential, our kids don't. They have been too taken care of. It's not fair to them.*



Regret of Lost Potential

- *I realized what they were trying to do, you know, in their minds they were trying to help [my son] to get out in the community, but it was too late for [him].*
- ***Like I always said, [my son] was ready for society, but society wasn't ready for [my son].***
- *If [my son] had been given the opportunity way back when, like the kids are given today, like we fought for the kids to have today, he could have gone to college. He could have, he's smart.*



Summary of Findings

- Fear of the Unknown
- Consistency and Safety/Sense of Space
- Increased Job Satisfaction, Skills, Interests
- Missed insular community (nostalgia)
- Expectations for Inclusion
- Looking Back: Regrets of Lost Potential
- Life After Sheltered Workshop



Conclusion

- While the initial transition was difficult, most families and participants were satisfied with the conversion process as long as they could maintain previous social networks and find acceptable employment in the community.

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Questions?





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