

Spring 4-14-2022

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Recommended Citation

Schlieder, V., & MacDermott, S. (2022, April 14). Inclusive Employment Opportunities for Adults with Down Syndrome. Poster presented at the Virtual OTD Capstone Symposium, University of St Augustine for Health Sciences. Retrieved from <https://soar.usa.edu/otdcapstones-spring2022/35>

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Inclusive Employment Opportunities for Adults with Down Syndrome

Valerie Schlieder, OTS; Susan MacDermott, OTD, OTR/L

BACKGROUND

What is Down syndrome?

Down syndrome (DS) is a condition in which individuals are born with an extra chromosome that causes developmental delays (CDC, 2021).

What is inclusive employment?

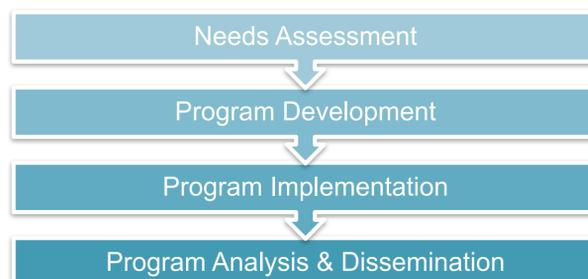
A work environment where people with disabilities are welcomed and valued for their contributions and they have the same opportunities as coworkers without disabilities (US Dept. of Labor, 2021).

PROBLEM

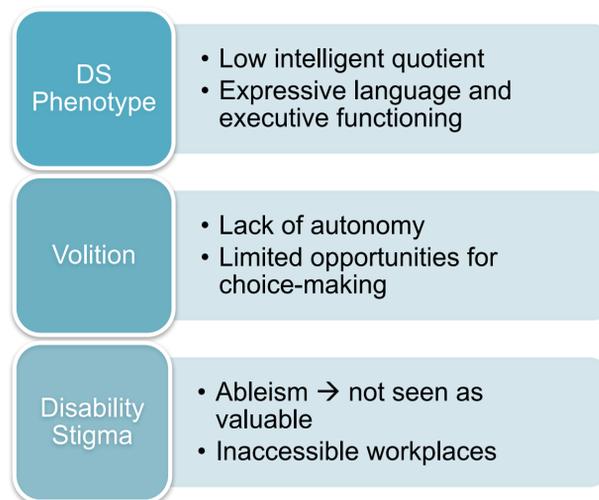
Only **20.5%** of adults with DS are employed or actively seeking employment. Individuals with DS face several barriers to accessing inclusive employment as they transition into adulthood and there are limited services available to support them (Kumin & Shoenbrodt, 2015).

PURPOSE

The **purpose** of this project is to identify barriers to employment for adults with DS and to create a **strengths-based program** focused on **client-centered interventions** and **community advocacy**. *The process of this project is outlined below:*



BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This program utilized three **theoretical frameworks** to address these barriers:

- The Ecology of Human Performance Model
- The Model of Human Occupation
- The Social Model of Disability

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Vision

Inclusive Employment Opportunities for Adults with DS

Mission

The mission of **EmployAble** is to increase access to inclusive employment opportunities for adults with DS through *group occupational therapy sessions*. The program will focus on employment readiness skills such as *interpersonal skills, professional communication, and self-advocacy*.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES



PROGRAM TIMELINE

Week 0: Pre-Program Individual Sessions

Weeks 1-5: Two 90 min sessions each week

Week 6: Post-Program Individual Sessions

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

| WEEK | TOPICS |
|------|---|
| 1 | Introduction, Job Interests, Workplace Roles, Communication Skills |
| 2 | Social/Interpersonal Skills, Professionalism, Keys to Being a Strong Employee |
| 3 | Teamwork, Handling Frustration & Asking for Help |
| 4 | Flexibility & Conflict Management, Responsibilities of Having a Job |
| 5 | Self-Advocacy, How to Get a Job, Program Review & Resumes |

EmployAble included 6 adults with DS ranging from 19 to 32 years old and took place at [GiGi's Playhouse, San Diego](#).

Acknowledgement:

Special thanks to *Katie Frank, PhD, OTR/L* for mentorship on this project.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

More than half of the group **improved** on:

- Appropriate greetings/goodbyes
- Asking for help when they need it
- Offering help as needed
- Taking responsibility for mistakes

Group members felt empowered to take on new jobs. Half of the individuals joined [PRIDE Industries](#), a community program that matches individuals with disabilities to appropriate community-based work opportunities with necessary supports.

Average scores from **program evaluation** completed by parents.

- Appropriate for son/daughter's needs: 4.8/5
- Will refer back to program materials: 4.8/5
- Communication from instructor: 5/5
- Instructor prepared for sessions: 5/5
- Satisfaction with the program: 5/5
- Would recommend the program: 5/5

IMPLICATIONS FOR OT

OT practitioners can bridge the gap between adults with DS and inclusive employment opportunities by:

- Disability advocacy in the workplace
- Education on workplace modifications
- Strengths-based programming for adults with DS

References:
Centers For Disease Control and Prevention. (2021, April 6). *Facts about Down syndrome*.
<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/birthdefects/downsyndrome.html>

Kumin, L., & Schoenbrodt, L. (2015). Employment in adults with Down syndrome in the United States: Results from a national survey. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 29(4), 330-345.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12182>

U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy. (2021). *Building an inclusive workforce*.