

Autism, MT Training, and the VACPID Model for Success

Issue: Implemented in 2016 as part of the Virginia Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities Grant Project (CPID) seven clients at the Wilson Workforce Rehabilitation Center (WWRC) were enrolled in Manufacturing Technology Courses, MS and MT1. The majority of the students enrolled in the MTT program at WWRC had no prior post-secondary training. For many, this experience was their first time away from home. When looking at the first four classes, 81%, would be considered neurodiverse with 23% having a major diagnosis of autism, meaning that they lacked social, behavioral and soft skills. All had qualified academically for the program.

The Manufacturing Technology (MT) training program is a highly specialized course based on the techniques and interrelationships found in high performance manufacturing and production. Instruction focuses on the critical actions, knowledge, systems, and processes necessary to participate in an advanced manufacturing enterprise. Activities include a focus on math and measurement; quality and continuous improvement practices; and, advanced manufacturing processes and production. The courses require an ability to focus on advanced material and hands on interaction (Manufacturing Skills Institute)

The MT training program was successful enough to become a DOL recognized pre-apprenticeship program through the Valley 2 Valley (V2V) Registered Apprenticeship grant awarded Virginia Career Works Shenandoah (VCW/Shenandoah through the US Department of Labor (vcwvalley).

Strategies:

The primary challenge for these students and the instructor was the lack of social competence and related skills necessary for training and participation in a work setting.

- Using VACPID grant funding to fund a behavioral support specialist, the instructor, the specialist and the VACPID OT designed a two week course to help equip the students with the 'tools' to successfully complete the MTT training program. (see curriculum provided separately on the Best Practices site). This preparatory course incorporated a Speech Therapist, Counselors, Occupational Therapist, and Tutors from WWRC two weeks prior to the beginning of the class.
- Using lessons learned and for sustainability, the soft skills interventions were fully integrated into the sixteen week program within two years. The current schedule provides instructor led teaching/lecturing during the morning with the soft skills activities integrated with the afternoon hands on activities. The impact of the social

knowledge / skills gains and positive behavioral impacts were observed to have a positive impact in overcoming social barriers associated with autism.

- In the past year, all WWRC students receive a Physical Work Performance Evaluation (PWPE) by the Physical Therapist and an Occupational Therapy Sensory Evaluation by the Occupational Therapist. Both therapies are integrated into the classroom. In addition, a Communications Skills Group is available to students who need this referral.

WWRC/CPID MT Residential Program

The program design recognizes life course transition/ achievement barriers and uses wrap around supports to support quality of life, independent living, career pathway attainment, and self-sufficiency.

The VACPID model combines an array of strategies to foster systems coordination and individual engagement and supports. It begins by providing information, opportunities for engagement, and informed decision making about participation as part of recruitment, before clients arrive at WWRC. Once engaged, knowledge, behavior and skills gained sustain their transition to the next phase of their journey. Strategies include proactive teaming and person centered planning that support transitions in and out of the VR/ workforce/ other community based programs, from the residential training environment to the workforce; the inclusion of technology/wrap around supports and development of new tools and skills to manage and tolerate new and challenging demands. Individual tasks support independence and the development of natural supports (ex, family members, mentors in the workplace). The AT specialist provided training, awareness and Technical Assistance business and training partners before, during, and after employment, as needed.

Resources:

<http://manufacturingskillsinstitute.org/>

<https://www.wwrc.net/manufacturing.htm#manufacturingtechtraining>

<https://vadars.org/drs/cpid/>

https://vcwvalley.com/wp-content/uploads/V2V_One_Pager_2017.pdf

<https://gwcre.org/event-virginia-cpid-a-fully-accessible-approach/>

A fully Accessible Approach. Join VACPID as they discuss assistive technology and how it can improve credential attainment and employment outcomes for participants.

Related Research on Autism, VR, and Career Pathways:

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