

Using Virtual Technologies to Expand Employment Supports: A Midwest UCEDD Collaboration



Four Midwest UCEDDs have been implementing the use of mainstream and virtual technologies, such as cell phones, tablets, and GoPro cameras using broadband and/or cellular data, to improve employment outcomes for supported workers with disabilities.

The use of iPads in the hands of supported workers, mentoring through texting with job coaches, and GoPro cameras in behavioral supports is proving to be effective for providing employment services and supports. While the sample size is admittedly small, the impact of these interventions is apparent.

Using iPads to provide job coaching services is less intrusive for the supported worker and more efficient for the job coaches. The use of texting for technical assistance and support for job coaches and vocational staff provides immediate responses to questions and keeps job coaches connected in rural settings. The ability to capture problematic behaviors in the natural environment, through the use of GoPro cameras, allows psychologists to develop strategies to reduce the behavior, addressing both the shortage of psychologists and the rural nature of the setting.

Mainstream and virtual technology use in supporting employment outcomes is nearly always less expensive and more efficient than disability specific assistive technologies and face to face services. At the same time, there are policy and systems level challenges with the funding for the device, the broadband, and the service provider time. Several states are exploring the use of these technologies in other community-based settings, creating the opportunity for collaboration to address a broad range of issues.

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Intervention

Job coaching via Facetime/Zoom or similar virtual technologies

Purpose

Identification of at least two accessible and affordable virtual technology applications to provide long-term job coaching, employment supports and crisis intervention services in the workplace.

Progress

- Four Community Rehabilitation Programs, sixteen supported workers and twenty-four job coaches have participated.
- Participants are using iPads in a variety of ways, including using the timers and alarms, facetime follow-up contacts, picture schedules and apps to destress or calm.
- Multiple applications have been tested and discovered. A list of apps available and used has been developed and can be viewed at <https://bit.ly/2PxJIQo>
- More than 170 interventions have been recorded. Most of the contacts have been check-in or other simple things (79%), 7% have been new learning, 9% follow-up from a previous incident and 5% have been for crisis intervention. The amount of time spent varies, but tends to be either under 15 minutes or over 2 hours. In those situations, coaches are using technology to support or augment their coaching while they are there.
- Seven Zoom community of shared practice sessions have been conducted for job coaches and their managers to learn and share.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

- Technology and access to WI-FI is not always readily available in the rural areas.
- Younger workers and younger job coaches seem to embrace this approach more rapidly than others.
- Virtual job coaching can be used not only during the initial and long-term job coaching but also discussed during job development. In this way, coaching through technology can be used by the supported worker, their employer, and natural supports.
- Although the targeted technology was using iPad minis, some participants preferred to use their smart phones which worked in many ways better (size, ownership and less stigmatizing).
- Using Zoom to create a community of shared practice with job coaches has led to some excellent discussions and creative solutions to challenges faced on the job, both by project participants, and other supported individuals.



Purpose

Leverage the use of assistive technology to promote greater independence and autonomy of businesses and individuals receiving home and community based (HCB) employment services while supporting employment providers with bridging labor pool shortages.

Progress

- Three organizations were recruited/selected with at least two support workers and a job coach assigned to work with each worker, purchasing two iPads for supported workers and Direct Service Providers at each pilot site. Performance metrics with sites are developed to capture the three domains set of data related to:
 - 1) Employment retention
 - 2) Decreased direct support hours
 - 3) Individual/employer satisfaction.
- Deployment of Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap), for workflow methodology and data collection via browser and app technology.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

- Using Apps to collect data on interaction/ intervention provided in remote location where connectivity is non-existent or scarce.
- Availability of iPad equipment for Job Coaches for training and skills development to best support workers



Intervention

Behavioral Supports via Virtual Telehealth Model

Purpose

Provide technical assistance to job coaches and employment teams via virtual technology platforms with a licensed psychologist. The teams are using GoPro cameras to capture individuals' behaviors in the natural environment. Video from the GoPro cameras is analyzed by the project psychologist to determine effective behavioral strategies that can be implemented to decrease inappropriate behavior. Appointments are conducted via telehealth technology for teams in rural parts of the state or those unable to attend in person.

Progress

- Twenty-nine participants with co-occurring disorders (i.e., intellectual disability and mental health disorder) have received a functional behavior assessment and recommendations to decrease target behaviors.
- Ongoing technical assistance is provided to participant's teams to better support the development of a behavior support plan and its implementation.
- Supported employment staff have received improved strategies to help the participant obtain or maintain employment.
- The Munroe-Meyer Institute is in the process of becoming an independent agency in order to provide Functional Behavioral Analysis as a developmental disability Medicaid waiver service.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

- Lack of supported employment funding in Nebraska for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.
- Use of video recording in compliance with employers' policies.
- Changes with service definitions and provider types has made it difficult for agencies to continue providing supported employment services.
- Individuals may not engage in inappropriate behaviors when they know they are being recorded with the GoPro cameras.



Intervention

Technical Assistance to job coaches using Texting

Purpose

A model of technical assistance is being replicated in year two after year one implementation of a pilot program focused on the use of texting for technical assistance and support with job coaches and vocational staff serving rural, urban and Native communities across the state.

Progress

- Eight job coaches recruited for year 2 of project – diverse in terms of age, experience, geography. Four additional job coaches continued from year 1.
- Started texting by offering group text for support and problem solving based upon year 1 feedback with option of individual texting to technical specialist.
- Questions from participants primarily focused on pre-placement kinds of issues such as job development and assessment ideas; others related to problems on the job site.
- Offered recurring Zoom online meetings for participants as a strategy to build a group community of practice among participants.
- Shared new and relevant resources on a regular basis to engage and inform the group.

Challenges/Lessons Learned

- Size of the texting group may be intimidating and/or some phones have limits on the number of people that can be in a texting group.
- Participant make-up can influence activity as indicated by supervisor/staff dyad reducing participation from staff who deferred to supervisor.
- To have job coaches feel comfortable and to remember to text when they have a question is a culture shift that builds with practice and may be influenced by other state-level activities.
- Getting people to text takes time – relationship building is critical.