CLBC SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

PROGRAM REVIEW

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Executive Summary

Introduction

In the late 1980s, the supported work program was initiated through a cost-sharing initiative with the Government of Canada. At its outset, the program had the following objectives:

- To assist with the shift from vocational 'programming' to helping people find and maintain employment and careers in the community;
- To provide flexible supports for people to be included in the workforce;
- To promote and market the concept of supported work in the community; and
- To create opportunities for individuals to work without additional supports within a 36-month period.

Since its inception in the 1980s, the supported work program has been the subject of minimal examination, analysis or review. This review was undertaken in an effort to assess how well the supported work program is meeting its stated objectives, to identify the most effective aspects of this program, and to serve as a basis for supporting future endeavours in this area.

Scope of Review

Currently, CLBC funds 54 agencies across the province to provide supported work services for adults with developmental disabilities. Not all agencies could be canvassed within the scope of this review, so in conjunction with CLBC a representative group was selected in order to provide an appropriate cross-section of the province's supported work service providers.

The 15 representative agencies included those that are private and not-for-profit; well-established and recently developed; in large and small population centres; in communities that are well-connected versus those that are more isolated; and those that have strict employment focuses versus a wider range of employment-related services. Together, these participants represent 28% of the total number of agencies that provide supported work programs in BC (15 of 54), and account for 41% of the total CLBC supported work budget ($2,912,853 of $7,051,104).

There are a couple of important caveats that should be borne in mind with respect to this review. First, participating agencies were recommended for inclusion by CLBC regional staff, and as a result the review may be over-inclusive of agencies with superlative programs. While this was by no means universally true, anecdotal information suggests that many of the programs that did not participate in the review may experience greater structural challenges than this representative sample.

A second factor is that this report attempts to classify a wide range activities that make up "supported work" and in doing so the reader may be tempted to draw direct comparisons between the agencies that are cited. However, this review is meant only as a "snapshot" of what supported employment programs currently look like across the province, and making comparisons or drawing conclusions about the relative characteristics of the programs was not one of its goals. Any comparisons would first require agreement about basic principles and definitions, which was not within scope of this review.

Program Characteristics

Based consultation with the 15 representative agencies and a review of the available documentation, this report sets out a number of key characteristics about the supported work programs that are funded by CLBC. There are challenges in applying conclusions about the representative sample to all programs across the province, as all programs are quite different in terms of focus, scope and operations. Nevertheless, the size of the representative sample (almost half of the total budget) and the range in characteristics of participating agencies provides the best basis available for drawing province-wide conclusions. Taking all of this into consideration, key characteristics of supported work programs include the following:

Budgets and clients served

- The average supported work budget for the representative agencies is approximately $200,100 – higher than the provincial average of $130,576.
- The 15 representative agencies supported work programs serve a total of 629 clients annually. This ranges from a high of 118 clients to a low of 14, with an average of approximately 42 clients per program.
- It is estimated that approximately 1534 clients throughout British Columbia receive supported work program services and supports.
- Most agencies do not keep or refer to waitlists, and either rely on CLBC to refer new clients as spots open up, or self-monitor to assess when new clients should be admitted to the program

Program components and characteristics

Pre-Employment

- Pre-employment services vary widely, but two-thirds of the representative agencies offer a pre-employment program that is a clearly identified, separate, and distinct phase in their supported work program.
- All agencies included job search services as a key part of their supported work program. Activities within job search were also fairly consistent (e.g. resume writing).
- Volunteer and work experience positions are widely used in pre-employment, and some agencies do not apply appropriate limits or objectives to these placements. Particularly concerning are “volunteer” placements at private businesses that have no philanthropic quality and are essentially unpaid work placements; and work experience placements that have no specific goals or objectives and/or do not set out limits on the length of time that the client will participate in the placement.

Employment

- Almost three-quarters (72%, or 455 of 629) of the sample agencies’ supported work clients are currently classified as ‘working’. Across BC as a whole, approximately 1105 individuals are currently working as a result of the program.
- Of the 455 clients who are working, approximately 83% (378) are in paid positions in integrated work places. Across the province, approximately 917 (83% of 1105) individuals are in paid integrated employment positions under the auspices of the supported work program.

- Over one-third of clients working in integrated settings have been in their positions for longer than three years.
- Almost one in five (18%) 'working' individuals are clients who are employed by the agency itself, either on a contract basis or in full employment.
- Agency-run programs that are legacies of supported work environments are still clearly a preferred means of operating for a small minority of agencies.

Post-employment

- Whether called job shadowing, site training or monitoring, all of the sample agencies' programs included one-on-one support on the worksite, diminishing and fading out over time as the client becomes comfortable and sufficiently independent.
- Agencies generally work towards a target of diminishing shadowing over one year, fading to substantive independence within three years.
- Most agencies maintain *ad hoc*, as-needed supports on an ongoing basis for their clients. Only two programs make clear efforts to enforce full independence and integration within three years.

Programs' conformity with stated objectives

Almost without exception, agencies are not at all familiar with the stated objectives of the supported work program. Nevertheless, it is the conclusion of this report that the vast majority of agencies have in fact built their programs around the desire to shift away from and offer alternatives to vocational programming, and to help people find and maintain employment in the community. To varying degrees and with different focuses, they all provide supports to assist with workforce inclusion and the all work to promote the concept of supported work in the community.

However, there are some concerns. While most agencies put the ideal of supported work at the forefront of their work and are seeing to facilitate truly inclusive work placements, there is a remnant of old vocational programming approaches in some programs. Those agencies that have designed and implemented programs that revolve around agency-operated businesses do not seem to conform to the stated objectives of moving away from vocational programming, providing flexible supports to help people be included in the general workforce, or promoting the concept of supported work.

And while the lack of a dedicated budget aimed at the third goal – to promote and market the concept of supported work in the community – is one of the issues that many agencies raised as a barrier to the supported work program, in practice all agencies work towards this goal. Some agencies have made specific efforts in this area, with sophisticated and polished marketing materials. Several agencies use well-produced and innovative written materials, DVDs and testimonials as part of their structured and focussed marketing campaigns.

The fourth goal, to create opportunities to work independently within 36 months, is the most common quantitative, measurable goal. Some agencies are highly mindful of this objective and make clear efforts to keep clients to a three-year timeframe for attaining independence in the workplace. Other programs make little effort to enforce any degree of independence within the three-year timeframe. Most programs fall somewhere in between, with the majority of clients reaching substantial independence, but maintaining

linkages and contact with the supported work program for assistance in dealing with specific challenges or changes in their workplaces. This flexibility is considered one of the cornerstone strengths of supported work; while movement though the program is to be encouraged, it is not necessary or helpful to completely discharge clients and force them to formally re-enrol if they have need for help in the future.

Program Strengths and Opportunities

The report sets out a number of positive features of supported work programs, both in terms of existing strengths and potential opportunities for improvement. Key strengths and opportunities include the following:

Program Strengths

- *Individualized support model:* ensuring that individuals are job-ready before placing them in a work situation is a fundamental strength of many of the supported work programs that were considered in this review.
- *On site support:* all agencies emphasized the benefit and value of providing one-on-one, on-site job coaching for clients in new work situations. Other programs that provide employment assistance to people with disabilities tend not to offer such individualized on-site support. All participants highly valued this facet of supported work, and many described it as the defining component of the program.
- *Job carving:* the ability to "job carve' – that is, to take portions of different jobs and create a job description that is suitable for a given client – is widely seen as a fundamental factor in securing positions that are successful for both employers and employees.

Program Opportunities

- *Transitioning into supported work*: while it is challenging to link youths into non-education programs as they transition to adulthood, there is a clear opportunity to work more closely with schools and CLBC to help ease the transition. Many agencies also noted that these linkages would be particularly welcome to help make early assessments about the appropriateness of supported work services.
- *Organizing information sharing:* while many agencies have developed strong, innovative, and efficient supported work programs, they have generally done so in isolation. Participants in this review consistently expressed a desire for a more organized and structural means of meeting together or circulating information about promising practices related to supported work.
- *Self-employment and micro enterprises:* while some agencies have embraced the notion of self-employment and micro-enterprise are an area of opportunity for clients, many others sound a note of caution when considering this as a focus for future work opportunities. Any move towards self-employment and micro-enterprise should be undertaken only with serious examination of the costs and benefits of these models.

Program Challenges

This review also identified a number of challenges to the supported work program, both at the structural/organizational level, and at the level of individual engagement in supported work services. Key challenges include:

Structural/organizational challenges

- *Ad hoc "supported" work:* many participating agencies articulated a concern about day programs that have begun to place clients in work situations – essentially running "supported work" programs off the sides of desks. Should problems arise with placements, there are few supports to help clients get through challenges, and employers may be left with a negative view of supported employment. The risk is considerable, as the success of the supported work program highly dependent on employer and community goodwill and open mindedness.
- *"Volunteering":* the tendency of some programs and employers to utilize long-term, inappropriate volunteer placements is exacerbated by a lack of standardized guidelines. Amongst supported work program, there is a lack of clarity regarding what is and is not acceptable in terms of volunteering or work experiences, and some of these do not appear to be in compliance with employment standards laws.
- *"Numbers in, numbers out":* there is concern about programs run through other ministries (e.g. the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance) or levels of government (e.g. federally-funded programs such as TheoBC) that provide little or no on-site support, or support that is strictly time-limited before clients are deemed independent and removed from the program. Many agencies report, in fact, that these same clients often end up losing their jobs and coming to the CLBC-funded programs that offer a more realistic, individual, and flexible approach to supported employment.
- *Pre-enrolment information about clients:* particularly in larger centres, but to a degree throughout the province, there is a lack of knowledge about the individual characteristics of the people who are referred to supported work programs. More people are being referred without proper assessments from CLBC, sometimes inappropriately and without a clear sense of what the client is ready for in terms of seeking and maintaining work.

Challenges to individual engagement

- *Family expectations:* A challenge for many supported work programs is an expectation from families, caregivers, and individuals that supported employment is essentially a supplement to an education program or a day program; that programs can identify and obtain very intermittent placements that will work around the other commitments of the individual.
- *Transition to adulthood:* The lack of transition supports and mechanisms from the school system to supported work means that many clients either go to drop-ins or attend day programs just to preserve predictability in their days. Agencies miss opportunities to provide extended intake, clients do not receive appropriate services, and employers are not able to fully access the potential pool of available employees through supported work.

- *MEIA benefits*: currently, the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance allows an earnings exemption of $500 for a person with disabilities (or $750 per couple), before deducting from monthly income assistance. Clients, families, and caregivers are highly cognizant of this limit, and many will consciously decline work in that earns in excess of $500 per month.

Recommendations

Taking all of the above into consideration, this report makes seven recommendations:

1. Retain and better communicate to agencies the objective of three years to independent work.
2. Retain flexibility in the three-year goal.
3. Retain structural flexibility of supported work programs.
4. Review supported work contracts with agencies.
5. Assist agencies to transition away from a vocational approach.
6. Create communications links and networking opportunities.
7. Review the inappropriate placement of clients in work situations.

CLBC Supported Work Program Review

1.0 BACKGROUND

As part of its mandate to ensure that individuals with developmental disabilities meet their personal needs and goals within their communities, Community Living British Columbia (CLBC) provides funding for a number of supported employment programs throughout the province. Supported employment programs are aimed at a range of activities that lead to and support individuals' participation in employment or employment-related activities such as pre-employment training, job search assistance, on-site job training, and volunteer/work experience leading to employment.

In the late 1980s, the supported work program was initiated through a cost-sharing initiative with the Government of Canada. At its outset, the program had the following objectives:

- To assist with the shift from vocational 'programming' to helping people find and maintain employment and careers in the community;
- To provide flexible supports for people to be included in the workforce;
- To promote and market the concept of supported work in the community; and
- To create opportunities for individuals to work without additional supports within a 36-month period.

In July 2005, responsibility for the supported work program transferred from the Ministry of Children and Family Development to the newly proclaimed crown agency, Community Living British Columbia. These objectives still broadly guide the program, although they have been supplemented and restated in the subsequent years, and have recently been identified as the following[1]:

- Supported work placements provide opportunities for adults with developmental disabilities to integrate into the workforce;
- They assist individuals with developmental disabilities in accessing work experience placements and in finding and keeping employment; and
- They promote and market the concept of supported work in the community.

Since its inception in the 1980s, the supported work program has been the subject of minimal examination, analysis or review. Currently, for example, very little is known about the range of services that are provided through supported work funding; the number of people whom the program serves; or outcomes for those clients. Given current initiatives to encourage and broaden opportunities for increased labour market involvement of individuals with developmental disabilities, it is timely to assess the extent to which the supported work program is meeting its stated objectives. It is also an opportunity to identify the most effective aspects of this program and what can be extrapolated from the experiences of agencies to support future endeavours in this area.

[1] BC's Labour Market Agreement for Persons with Disabilities -2006 Annual Report, Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance.

2.0 SCOPE

This document reports on a review of the supported work program conducted in October and November, 2007. The review sought to determine how supported work programs are meeting the original objectives of the program, whether those objectives are still reasonable and what impact programs have had on individual outcomes.

The scope of the review was defined from the beginning of the process, with the following components falling within scope:

- Analysis of the current state of the supported work program, including analysis of factors including but not limited to:
    - The number and location of agencies providing supported work services;
    - The number of clients served;
    - The nature of services provided through supported work programs;
    - The cost of services provided through supported work programs;
    - How supported work programs are operated by agencies;
    - What is working well with current supported work program;
    - Issues relating to the operation and administration of supported work programs;
    - Issues relating to meeting the stated objectives of the program;
- Identification of options to address the issues identified; and
- Recommendations on how to proceed with the supported work program.

It was equally important to clarify possible elements of a review that fell out of the scope of this process. Accordingly, the following points were identified as out of scope and were not considered in the course of this review:

- Consideration of the federal partnership of the supported work program;
- Consideration of the basic mandate of the supported work program; and
- Consideration of the functional outcomes arising from supported work program services

In addition to a review of the available documents, the primary means of conducting this review were a series of site-visits and interview with agencies that provide supported work services. It was not within this review's scope, however, to meet with all agencies that CLBC funds to provide supported work services – instead, a representative group was selected and results from these meetings form the basis of findings and conclusions about the program as a whole.

3.0 METHODOLODGY

As noted above, the focus of this review was on meeting directly with selected agencies in order to discuss their experiences with the supported work program, including how their programs are structured, how their services are provided, what client bases they serve, and what are the main challenges or issues that they must address in providing supported work services.

Currently, CLBC funds 54 agencies across the province to provide supported work services for eligible clients – that is, persons over the age of 18 with a developmental disability.[2] Not all agencies could be canvassed within the scope of this review, so in conjunction with CLBC a representative group was selected to participate in the process. These agencies were provided in part on the advice of regional managers who have the greatest familiarity with the agencies in their areas. Agencies were chosen in order to provide, as much as possible, an appropriate cross-section of the province's supported work service providers.

Towards this goal, the fifteen agencies that were selected allowed for a representative consideration of a full range of program characteristics, including agencies with a range of budgets; private and not-for-profit; well-established and recently developed; in large and small population centres; in communities that are densely populated well-connected versus those that are more isolated; and those that have strict employment focuses versus a wider range of employment-related services.

The fifteen participating agencies are the following:

1. Chilliwack Society for Community Living (Chilliwack SCL), Chilliwack
2. Cranbrook Society for Community Living (Cranbrook SCL), Cranbrook
3. Community Living Victoria (CLV), Victoria
4. Developmental Disabilities Association – Jobs West (DDA), Vancouver
5. Garth Homer Society (GHS), Victoria
6. Kardel Consulting Services, Victoria
7. Mission Association for Community Living (MACL), Mission
8. Polaris Employment Services, Burnaby
9. Provincial Networking Group Inc. (PNGI), Terrace
10. SMART Options, Kamloops
11. Surrey Association for Community Living (SACL), Surrey
12. TIER Support Services (TIER), Kelowna
13. Vancouver Island Community Connections (VICC), Courtenay
14. Vernon and District Association for Community Living (VDACL), Vernon
15. Williams Lake Association for Community Living (WLACL), Williams Lake

Together, these participants represent 28% of the total number of agencies that provide supported work programs in BC (15 of 54), and account for 41% of the total CLBC supported work budget ($2,912,853 of $7,051,104).

[2] As defined by CLBC – an I.Q. of 70 or less.

It must be noted that CLBC regional managers selected the agencies that would participate in the review. An unintended consequence of this selection may have been a lower representation of problematic programs, and a tendency to want to highlight positive programs. This was not universally the case, but it may result in an overall picture that underemphasizes programs which, anecdotal information suggests, may present greater challenges and issues.

Agencies were selected in mid-October, and their participation in this review was requested shortly thereafter. Throughout November, individual meetings were held at each of the participant's supported work sites. In advance of these meetings, participants were provided with a standard meeting request correspondence, which also included notification of the topics that would be addressed in the course of the interview.

Determination of individual participants was left to the agencies to decide, but generally included interviews with executive directors and directors of the supported work programs. A number of agencies also provided work-site visits, where these were not disruptive to the client or the workplace in general. All participants also provided access to all documentation that was requested.

After an initial review of the information that was provided, a number of follow-up calls were made to agencies to confirm data and figures provided, particularly with respect to the number of clients that participate in the various aspects of agencies' programs, the employment outcomes for those clients, the degree of work that employed clients experience, and the levels of remuneration that clients experience as a result of the supported work program.

Taken together, this information provides the foundation for the findings and conclusions that are presented in this report. While the review was not comprehensive in that not all agencies were directly included in its scope, we are confident that the breadth and proportion of the representative sample provides a solid base on which to place these findings.

4.0 PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS

Through the supported work program, CLBC funds over 50 agencies to provide various types of employment-related services, ranging from work preparation, work experience, job training, on-site support and ongoing monitoring. This section outlines the range and characteristics of services that are currently funded through CLBC's supported work budget.

4.1 Program budgets, sizes, and scopes

A first step in the consideration of the supported work program is to identify as clearly as possible the scope and reach of the program, in terms of the amount of funding that is invested and the number clients that are currently served. Our review also took into consideration a number of other factors about how programs are structured and how this might impact the scope and range if clients served.

The first point of note is that all of the agencies in this review are subject to global budgets for the supported work program – none are currently involved in situations that include individualized funding arrangements. Indeed, of the 15 participating agencies, only one indicated that individualized funding was something that they were seriously planning for, and all felt that it would be extremely challenging to reorganize programs to take this different funding model into account. The one agency that is anticipating individualized funding also anticipates that this will be a catalyst to help move it forward from its supported work program's somewhat antiquated focus on community volunteering – this is described in greater detail later in this report.

The parameters of these global contracts vary widely: some are restricted to employment programs with clear boundaries and clearly prescribe the services that are to be provided (e.g. a funding arrangement only for pre-employment training), while other supported work budgets are subsumed under much larger vocational programming budgets and only provide vague terms for expected services. Some contracts set out a specific number of clients that are to be served, while others set out a range, and still others do not indicate any expected number clients that are to be served.

The size of budgets varies widely, from a high of $512,125 to a low of $17,994 (although in that case CLBC funding only accounts for a portion of the approximately $120,000 supported work program cost – the rest is provided through the agency's work program revenues). The average supported work budget for the representative agencies is approximately $200,100 – higher than the provincial average of $130,576.

The bulk of all agencies' budgets go towards supporting the staff that provides supported work services, although most (but not all) budgets also include small provisions for administration and capital costs. The number of full time equivalent positions in agencies' supported work programs ranges from 1.25 FTE to 8.0 FTE, with an average of approximately 3.0 FTE. The total number of FTEs in the representative sample is 45.75. Applying the overall funding ratio (41% of the total budget) to FTEs, it is fair to conclude that there are a total of approximately 111.5 FTEs in supported work programs across the province.

Determining the number of clients that are served by supported work programs is more challenging, for two main reasons. The first complication is that agencies all have different ways to determine the composition of client lists. Some agencies are very strict about "de-listing" clients once the client has reached a sufficient level of independence in the workplace, while others keep people on their lists as clients and consider them part of the supported work program, even though the agency may only have very intermittent contact with the individual – annual check-ins, informal contact, and ongoing availability to help through crises. Some agencies strictly adhere to a 3-year limit on client participation in supported work programs, while others have maintained clients on their lists for upwards of 15 years.

A second challenge is that agencies have different conceptions of the boundaries of their supported work programs, which is particularly notable with respect to work experience and volunteering positions. While some agencies consider these activities as important steps in the progression to employment, others see work experience and especially volunteer positions as entirely separate programs, so do not include those individuals in their counts of the number of clients served by their supported employment program.

With those caveats in mind, and based largely on agencies' reports of the number of clients served,[3] our review indicates that the 15 representative agencies supported work programs serve a total of 629 clients annually. This ranges from a high of 118 clients to a low of 14 , with an average of approximately 42 clients per program. Again, applying the 41% funding ratio – the best comparative indicator available for this review – it can be estimated that each year approximately 1534 clients throughout British Columbia receive supported work program services and supports.

The difference in how agencies count clients is one of the primary explanations for the wide range of client to FTE ratios that the data reveals, from a low of 5:1 to a high of 30:1 .The average ratio in the participating agencies is approximately 14:1 – a ratio that is more or less the actual experience of agencies like agency C agency L, and agency M.

These results are summarized on the table below:

Table 1
Supported Work Programs: Size and Composition

Agency	Budget	Staff	Total clients	Client to FTE ratio
A	170,988	3.0 FTE	22	7:1
B	90,793	2.0 FTE	61	30:1
C	117,452	2.0 FTE	27	14:1
D	219,000	3.0 FTE	28	9:1
E	512,135	8.0 FTE	46	6:1
F	131,592	1.5 FTE	28	18:1
G	236,396	2.8 FTE	14	5:1
H	150,872	2.0 FTE	43	21:1
I	102,973[4]	1.2 FTE	28	23:1
J	224,000	3.5 FTE	82	23:1
K	107,850	1.25 FTE	35	28:1
L	470,124	8.0 FTE	118	15:1
M	135,776	2.5 FTE	40	16:1
N	17,994[5]	2.0 FTE	35	18:1
O	224,908	3.0 FTE	22	7:1
Total - sample	2,912,853	45.75 FTE	629	14:1
Total - province[6]	7,051,104	111.5 FTE	1534	14:1

Further considerations impact the composition of agencies' supported work programs. For example, while the number of clients in each program ranges widely, this is only in part due to the specific contractual obligations of the agencies. Indeed, only eight of the fifteen sample agencies' contracts set out specific numbers of clients that are to be provided services; of these, three state specific numbers and five set out a range (with one providing a range of 100% - 40 to 80 clients are to be served). Seven of fifteen agencies work under supported work contracts that set no expected level of client services.

[3] This is subsequently discussed and analyzed in greater detail.
[4] References only the Terrace office. Total PNGI budget of $159,867 also covers a separate Kitimat office.
[5] CLBC portion of total program budget of $120,000 (remainder from revenue).
[6] Applying the 41% budget ratio.

A second factor that impacts that size of supported work programs is the provenance of clients. With the exception of two agencies (agency H and agency N), the supported work programs we canvassed were entirely or almost entirely supported through CLBC funding. Nevertheless, almost half of the sample agencies accept clients other than those that are referred to the program by CLBC (although it appears that clients universally meet CLBC eligibility requirements). These clients may be brought to the program directly by families or caregivers, or referred by other agencies in the community (the latter practice is particularly prevalent in Victoria, which has well-established communications amongst the agencies that provide supported work services). While this practice is not necessarily troublesome, it does impact the ability of supported work funding to reach an appropriate audience.

Finally, waitlists are another factor that are inconsistently applied and utilized across the province. The majority of agencies do not keep or refer to waitlists, and either rely on CLBC to refer new clients as spots open up, or self-monitor to assess when new clients should be admitted to the program. Five of fifteen participating agencies do maintain or refer to waitlists although one of these – agency D – is maintained by CLBC and is an approximation of the average time that clients who have been referred to the program wait before a spot opens to allow their admission.

These additional factors that affect supported work programs' sizes and staff/client ratios are summarized below:

Table 2
Supported Work Programs: Factors affecting program size and ratios

Agency	Budget	Total clients	Client : FTE ratio	Contract sets number of clients	CLBC referrals only	Wait List
A	170,988	22	7:1	Up to 16	Y	N
B	90,793	61	30:1	N	N	N
C	117,452	27	14:1	N	Y	N
D	219,000	28	9:1	24	Y	Y (3 mo)
E	512,135	46	6:1	N	N (50%)	3
F	131,592	28	18:1	N	N	N
G	236,396	14	5:1	14	Y	N
H	150,872	43	21:1	27-30	N (15%)	Y
I	102,973	28	23:1	10	Y	N
J	224,000	82	23:1	N	Y	N
K	107,850	35	28:1	Up to 30[7]	Y	N
L	470,124	118	15:1	40-80	N	37
M	135,776	40	16:1	40	Y	10
N	17,994	35	18:1	N	N	N
O	224,908	22	7:1	N	N	N

[7] For pre-employment services only

4.2 Components of supported work programs

Although the components of what agencies consider to be part of their supported work programs vary widely, conceptually they generally break down into three phases: pre-employment assessment and training, job search, and supported employment. Within these three categories, supported work programs offer a myriad of different services. The sections that follow outline some of the commonalities and differences amongst the agencies that took part in this review.

4.3 Pre-employment

Amongst agencies we considered, there is no consistent definition of what constitutes a pre-employment service. Very few agencies would say that they do not offer pre-employment services, and examination of the services that are offered suggests that it is true that all agencies offer some degree of support in assisting clients become "work ready."

The degree to which these services are structured, formalized, offered and delivered varies widely, however. All agencies, for example, include an assessment phase when a new client is enrolled, during which an individualized approach is taken to:

- Identify goals (both employment-specific and more general)
- Determine skills and abilities
- Identify challenges
- Discuss where the client might want to work, or what sort of work they envisage doing
- Meet with families and caregivers to get a sense of the other supports that are available to the client.

All agencies use this phase as a means of assessing whether the client and the supported work program are a good fit for each other. For some agencies this is a more significant phase than for others, depending on how much information about the client is available to the agency in advance. As a general rule, this first phase is becoming more important, as less background assessment information about the client is provided in advance.

After assessment, there is a distinction between the types of pre-employment support that agencies provide. Drawing this distinction was not an exact science, and most agencies would probably contend that they do provide pre-employment services. For the purposes of this review, a conceptual line was drawn between those agencies that include a clearly separate "pre-employment" phase in their supported work program versus those that include more ad hoc assistance to clients on an individual basis, where required. As Table 3 illustrates, two-thirds of the representative agencies (10 of 15) offer a pre-employment program that is a clearly identified, separate, and distinct phase in their supported work program.

The overarching goal of pre-employment services is to identify those clients who are not yet ready to work in an integrated setting and help them gain the skills and experiences that will allow them to move towards independent employment. Some new clients enrol in supported work and are ready to begin searching for work immediately – this is particularly true of many younger clients, who have had the benefit of an integrated

school experience that has often included one or more work experiences as part of their educational program. Other clients, however, may not have had previous work experience and may not be ready to start looking for employment. Pre-employment services are aimed at this latter group of clients.

Table 3
Pre-Employment Programs

Agency	Pre-empt program?	Components	Clients in pre-empt program
A	Y	• Dressing and hygiene • Interview role playing • Resume writing, networking • Length based on individual	0 of 22
B	N	• No formal/class training • Functional focus	-
C	Y	• Job Club includes networking, resume writing hygiene, appearances	6 of 27 (22%)
D	Y	• 2-4 month training plan: skills determination, interviewing, hygiene, etc. • Work experience / volunteering a cornerstone	13 of 28 (46%)
E	N	• No classroom/separate pre-employment program • Pre-employment needs determined though individual employment planning process • Pre-employment activities provided as needed, including skill development, resume writing, interview skills, etc.	-
F	N	• No formal/separate pre-employment • Individualized supports, though – hygiene, skills determination, interest inventory, etc.	-
G	Y	• Training through James Stansfield programs – videos, books, games • Pre-employment is actually focus of the program	8 of 14 (57%)
H	Y	• "Discovery" phase • Job club, job readiness • Vocations assessments • Training/resources available • Linkages to skills preparation through local colleges	14 of 43 (33%)
I	N	• No formal/class training • Functional focus	-
J	Y	• Resume writing, interview skills • Hygiene, appearance • Familiarizing with business world • 1 week program	6 of 82 (7%)
K	Y	• Only funded for pre-employment • If not work ready: job club, other pre-employment options offered • One day per week; unlimited length of attendance	3 of 35 (9%)
L	Y	• ISP, SNAPS based • Vocational and life skills program available	20 of 118 (17%)
M	N	• Not a formal pre-employment program • Job preparation phase (1-4 weeks) includes resume writing, ad hoc life skills	-
N	N	• Many clients part of "therapeutic work" and other agency programs – no specific pre-employment program	-
O	Y	• Resume writing • Related training (Foodsate, specific skills development) offered • Length and participation based on individual	2 of 22 (9%)

Pre-employment services generally include both hard skills such as resume writing and interview role-playing, along with softer skills such as hygiene, appropriate attire and managing appearances. The agencies that offer pre-employment services generally have a classroom setting set aside, and utilize a wide range of tools to communicate their curricula. The time limits on pre-employment services vary – some programs have one-week or three-week components, while others are more flexible and continue as long as the client needs to access the service.

The proportion of clients in agencies' pre-employment also varies, from a low of zero to a high of 46%. A number of factors contribute to this range, including the skills level of clients that are referred to the program, the point in the employment cycle that this review's "snapshot" encountered, and the way that the program is structured. This latter point warrants some description, as it goes to the heart of how some programs operate.

As noted in Table 3, agency D program counts a high proportion of its clients as pre-employment (46%). This is somewhat a matter of definition, as 10 of the 13 pre-employment clients are actually in volunteer positions, which agency
D counts as part of its pre-employment, rather than employment, services. Maintaining this group as a single count reflects agency D's operational reality, in which volunteering – with clear time limits, outcome expectations, and parameters on sponsoring agencies – plays a cornerstone role in ensuring that clients are ready for employment in integrated settings.

Volunteering plays a different role in other agencies, which consider volunteer placements to be akin to work positions. Some agencies also call these placements work experiences, although the range of what both these classifications entail varies from agency to agency. For agency D and agency A, for example, volunteer/work experience placements are strictly time-limited and include specific expected outcomes for client development.

Table 4
Volunteer Placements

Agency	Total clients	Pre-employment program	Volunteer/ work experience[8]
A	22	0	9
B	61	0	2
C	27	6	2
D	28	13	0
E	46	0	5
F	28	0	0
G	14	8	12
H	43	13	0
I	28	0	0
J	82	6	4
K	35	3	26[9]
L	118	20	25
M	40	2	0
N	35	0	10
O	22	2	0
Total	**655**	**73**	**95**

[8] When the agency classifies volunteer/work experience as a separate service from pre-employment
[9] 6 of whom are also in paid employment positions

Agencies such agency B include volunteer positions as part of their programs in large part because clients have specifically requested a position with an organization that is aimed at the public interest. Other agencies have a much less defined approach to volunteer or work experience positions. In agency G volunteering makes up almost the entirety of its supported work program, as 12 of 14 clients volunteer with local agencies in long-term, ongoing positions. Agency K has a similar approach, where 26 of its clients are in volunteer positions.

These agencies also share with agency N a tendency to classify unpaid work as volunteering or work experience, even when the placement is long-term and for a sponsor that is clearly a business and not a philanthropic organization. City clean-up crews, thrift stores, and even coffee shops have been placements for "volunteer" positions, for example. While this situation was in the minority amongst the participating agencies, anecdotal information from other agencies suggests that, throughout the province, this is not an uncommon practice.

There also appears to be some confusion about the role of volunteering within a supported work program. Some clients prefer this activity, and some agencies clearly rely on volunteering as a cornerstone of their "supported work" program. However, long-term volunteering that does not lead (in theory or practice) to employment seems contrary to the objectives of the supported employment program, and using supported work funding for a volunteering program is a practice that should be more closely reviewed.

4.4 Job Search

All fifteen agencies that participated in this review included job search services as a key part of their supported work program. Activities within job search were also fairly consistent, including matching client skills with available situations; helping clients to create resumes and fill out applications; creating and maintaining job databases; arranging interviews; meeting with employers; and helping clients negotiate the terms of their employment.

Throughout the province, agencies reported that their job search phase is currently much less challenging that it has been in the past. The employment market is uniformly strong across the regions, reducing the pressure on agencies to identify possible positions for their clients, and broadening the scope of possible placements in the integrated work force.

The specific approaches that agencies take to helping their clients secure employment varies, from reviewing local "help wanted" ads to developing standing positions for agency clients, and from door-to-door marketing to informal discussion with business leaders in the community. All agencies reported that a fundamental factor in their success at identifying and securing potential supported work placements was a strong network of relationships in the local business community, which allowed them to profile their supported work programs and put the idea of hiring a client within view of a multitude of potential employers.

Another common component for successful job search programs is the ability of agencies to propose and work with employers to "job carve" – that is, to identify work tasks that may not be collected under an existing job description, but which could be re-packaged into a position that is suitable for a supported work client. Agencies such as agency M and the agency I emphasized this practice as a key component of their job search programs.

The following table outlines the number of clients in agencies' job search programs, as well as the proportion of total clients who are in the job search phase of supported work.

Table 5
Clients Job Searching

Agency	Total clients	Job Search	Percentage job searching
A	22	0	0
B	61	0	0
C	27	6	22%
D	28	10	36%
E	46	2	4%
F	28	8	29%
G	14	0	0
H	43	9	21%
I	28	5	18%
J	82	18	22%
K	35	4	11%
L	118	6	5%
M	40	5	13%
N	35	1	3%
O	22	0	0
Total	**629**	**74**	**12%**

The next section considers the outcomes of job search efforts by examining the number of agencies' supported work clients that are currently in the workforce, as well as the characteristics of those work placements.

4.5 Employment through supported work

The heart of the supported work program is its ability to secure and help clients maintain positions in integrated settings in the workforce. This section describes how many clients are "working" through supported work programs, the range in the nature of work positions, and some key characteristics about the work that clients have secured.

All agencies reported a high proportion of clients who have had success in securing work. Agency-specific numbers are set out in Table 6, which shows that almost three-quarters (72%, or 455 of 629) of the sample agencies' supported work clients are currently working. Extrapolating the representative sample to the province as a whole, it is estimated that approximately 1105 individuals across British Columbia are currently working as a result of the program.

The category of "working" is fairly broadly defined by some agencies, and the specific factors that are included vary from agency to agency. Some include volunteer positions

and/or work experience positions in their calculations and some do not; some restrict their tally only to integrated positions and some include segregated work crews; some include self-employed clients and some do not; some stop including clients in their tallies once substantial independence is obtained while others maintain clients on their lists on an ongoing basis.

Taking all of these factors into consideration, Table 6 summarizes the current disposition of clients who are "working", and breaks this down into some important constituent elements or situations.

Table 6
Clients Working

Agency	Total clients	Working	Paid integrated (-3yrs)	Paid integrated (+3yrs)	Employed by agency[10]	Self-employed
A	22	13	13	0	3	0
B	61	59	31	28	1	0
C	27	25	0	0	25	0
D	28	15	9	5	1	0
E	46	39	21	17	1	1
F	28	20	13	7	0	0
G	14	5	2	3	0	0
H	43	17	13	4	2	0
I	28	23	7	10	8	1
J	82	54	25	12	9	8
K	35	30	13	7	10	0
L	118	67	50	17	0	0
M	40	35	17	8	0	0
N	35	33	22	11	10	0
O	22	20	10	3	12	0
Total	**629**	**455**	**246**	**132**	**82**	**10**

As Table 6 illustrates, the bulk of supported work clients are currently involved in actual work situations, rather than training, preparing, or searching for work. Of the 455 clients who are working, approximately 83% (378) are in paid positions in integrated work places – these include offices and restaurants, mechanic shops and agricultural businesses, small retail shops and national chain stores. Using the representative agencies as a sample for the province as a whole, it is estimated that approximately 917 (83% of 1105) individuals are in paid integrated employment positions under the auspices of the supported work program.

The second major category of "working" individuals is made up of those clients who are employed by the agency itself – almost one in five, or approximately 18% of "working" clients fall into this category. The form that this relationship takes varies, but is generally characterized by agencies that have developed enterprises such as paper shredding businesses; or that have contracted with municipal or other agencies to provide outdoor maintenance / beautification services.

The specific employment relationship in these cases depends on the context: where the agency has set up an organized business, the agency serves as the employer of its own

[10] Includes integrated positions, plus non-integrated employment or subcontract/work crew relationships.

clients and is responsible for the payment of wages, tax remittances, and compliance with labour laws. An example is agency C's Shredding company, which provides full-time work for five individuals and part-time work for another.

In situations where agencies have contracted with a third party to provide a service, the agency generally pays clients out of the contract revenue on a piecemeal or hourly "contract" basis and there is no official employer. An example is agency O, which contracts with third parties to provide ground maintenance, wire cutting, paper routes and residence cleaning services. The agency assigns clients as appropriate to perform the contracted services. Clients are paid minimum wage, but there is no formal employer/employee relationship.

A smaller category – but one that appears to be growing in profile and application – is that of self-employed clients. The examples that we came across in the course of this review were limited in scope, and mostly consisted of house cleaning enterprises where the agency served as a means of communicating the availability and terms of services that are available for third parties to hire. Many agencies noted that while self-employment is not yet a widespread phenomenon, a growing number of clients – often younger clients – are expressing interest in developing and managing their own businesses.

Finally, it is worth noting that over one-third (35%, or 132 of 378) of paid positions in integrated settings are occupied by supported work clients who have been in their positions for longer than three years. A minority of agencies are very clear in only maintaining client lists for three years. Most agencies, however, continue to maintain clients on their lists even after clients have been in the same position for longer than three years, and often when client contact is highly intermittent and informal. All agencies – including those with strict three-year limits – indicated that informal, ongoing contact with clients is an important and integral part of the services they provide. Agencies consistently reported that this informal service – which often crisis-driven, as clients face new challenges or changes in the workplace – is a fundamental reason that they are able to help clients maintain stability and retain long-term positions.

With the exception of agency-managed work crews, most work places are characterized by full integration in that supported work clients are not grouped into workplaces with a number of other clients that have developmental disabilities. While some employers are particularly open to hiring supported work clients in multiple locations (e.g. Thrifty Foods in the Greater Victoria area), we did not encounter situations where employers focussed or targeted supported work clients to provide niche positions. Agencies instead work with a wide range of employers, and tend to seek out positions for specific individuals rather than fill a "quotas" position.

While some agencies reported that it is challenging to secure supported work positions in union environments, other agencies have had success in this respect. In some situations, this unionized workplace is the agency itself, which has hired supported work client into an integrated position. Other unionized positions included working at large retail chains and grocery stores.

Table 7 sets out the number and type of employers that agencies report working with through their supported work programs.

Table 7
Number and type of employers

Agency	Total working	Number of employers	Union Jobs	Employed by agency itself
A	13	15-20	Y	3
B	59	~40	Y	1
C	25	1	N	25
D	15	25	Y	1
E	39	38	N	1
F	20	19	Y	0
G	5	10	N	0
H	15	15	Y	2
I	23	20	N	8
J	54	29	N	9
K	30	21	Y	10
L	67	160	N	0
M	33	30	Y	0
N	35	20	N	10
O	20	14	N	12

Finally, while agencies keep records with varying degrees of detail regarding the terms and conditions of clients' employment, all reported work that is paid at least minimum wage. A large majority of placements are paid at the $8.00 per hour rate, although wages range up to a high of $18.00 per hour. The number of hours in the average work week varies greatly, from two up to 40, depending on the individual client's abilities, desires, and opportunities. Table 8 summarizes these characteristics.

Table 8
Wages and hours

Agency	Total working	Average wage paid	Range in wages	Average hours per week	Range in hours
A	13	~8.00	8.00-10.00	N/A	N/A
B	59	9.05	8.00-16.39	15.5	4-40
C	25	8.00	8.00	5	4-32
D	15	~9.00	8.00-18.00	~18	2-38
E	39	N/A	8.00-15.00	14.6	4-40
F	20	9.20	8.00-11.50	22.5	7-40
G	4	~8.00	8.00-12.50	~4	4-6
H	15	8.90	8.00-17.10	~20	~8-30+
I	23	9.15	8.00-14.00	10.6	4-35
J	54	8.00	8.00-12.50	N/A	N/A
K	30	9.03	8.00-10.00	14	4-40
L	67	~8.00	8.00-14.75	~15	2-40
M	33	9.00	8.00-14.00	7.2	2-30
N	35	~8.00	8.00-18.00	~12	2-32
O	20	~8.00	8.00-11.00	~8	4-15

4.5 Job shadowing, monitoring, and "graduation" from supported work

Along with assistance in searching for jobs, a second consistent characteristic shared by all agencies' supported work programs is the provision on on-site support to clients transitioning into the workforce. Whether called job shadowing, site training or monitoring, a cornerstone of all programs is one-on-one workplace support from a coach, diminishing and fading out over time as the client becomes comfortable and sufficiently independent.

The time that job coaches spend on-site with clients depends entirely on the needs of the individual client. Generally, there will initially be a more intense period of one-on-one support, where the job coach attends on site for the full shift and ensures that the client is comfortable and able to perform their duties. This period may be very brief or it may last a number of weeks.

As with the initial one-on-one phase, the length and intensity of shadowing varies widely. Over time, and on a gradual basis, job coaches decrease the length and intensity of their attendance at the work site, as clients become more and more comfortable. Because of the individual approach, it is very challenging to estimate the average time that long job shadowing and phasing out takes. Most agencies work on a more or less formal target of diminishing shadowing over one year. Others are less restrictive, such as agency F, which provides ongoing, non-time-limited support to a much higher degree and for a much longer period than many other agencies that participated in this review.

The stated guidelines of the supported work program specify that after three years, clients should be substantively independent and have transitioned into the integrated workplace. Nevertheless, as noted in above in Table 6, approximately one-third of working clients have been in their positions longer than three years, but still maintain ties and contact to their agency's supported work program. This is not surprising when once considers that only three of the fifteen agencies officially recognize an independence limit of three years or less. Twelve of fifteen agencies do not even attempt to impose a time limit on service, and as noted elsewhere in this report, in reality all agencies maintain ongoing contact with clients long past the three-year limit.

Only two programs – agecny A and agency H – seem to have built programs in whole or in part around a clear effort to enforce full independence and integration within three years. Others such as agencies F,G,O and C make minimal efforts to move clients off their roles and "graduate" clients from their programs. Most agencies lie somewhere in the middle, with the majority of clients achieving substantial independence within three years, but with the ongoing ability to access their agency's supported work services on an ad hoc basis, as circumstances in the workplace or in their lives required temporary and specific assistance.

Table 9 summarizes the approaches of the representative agencies with respect to on-site support and time limits for participation in the supported work program.

Table 9
Provision of and limits to on-site support

Agency	On-site support	Contact time limited	Time Limited?
A	Y	Y	• Monitor up to 2 years. • After 3 yrs –graduated (50 to date, 12 of which have some minimal contact)
B	Y	N	• Phase out over time, but no time limits enforced or planned for. Many long-term clients.
C	Y	N	• All are employed by the agency and either work on site (shredding) or in the community (clean up)
D	Y	Y	• 3 month phase out; 1 year to independence • Ongoing contact as necessary
E	Y	N	• 3 month "probation"; 3 yr independence goal • Not strictly enforced • Ongoing check in part of practice for all clients
G	Y	N	• May be minimal contact, but ongoing with all clients. • 35% of working clients are over 3 years.
H	Y	N	• No plan to phase out shadowing • Most are long term clients
I	Y	Y	• Most intensive support done by 1 year • 3 years maximum for ongoing contact • Ongoing crisis contact as necessary
J	Y	N	• One on one support for 3 weeks • Phase out site support over time • Monitoring stage includes weekly support meetings with employer and employee • Transition to quarterly contact, annual performance evaluation, ongoing support
K	Y	N	• If client is not independent within 3-4 months, will look for alternative • Kept on client list indefinitely, for assistance as needed
L	Y	N	• One-on-one phased out, but ongoing contact with all clients • Current client average: 5.8 yrs • 12 clients "discharged" – but still follow up with them
M	Y	Y	• General phasing out, but clients continue with ongoing drop-in/contact
N	Y	N	• Job shadowing phases out, but no set time limit.
O	Y	N	• Aim for 4 months, but based on individual. Many long term clients. • Ongoing, non-time-limited support: "no one goes off the program"

Taking all of the foregoing into consideration, Table 10 summarizes the supported work programs of the fifteen representative agencies in terms of the number of clients served, and the participation rates of those clients in supported work program components.

Table 10
Supported programs – summary of client activities

Agency	Total clients[11]	Working	Paid integrated (-3yrs)	Paid integrated (+3yrs)	Employed by agency[12]	Self-employed	Job Search	Pre-emp program	Volunteer/ work exp
A	22	13	13	0	3	0	0	0	9
B	61	59	31	28	1	0	0	0	2
C	27	25	0	0	25	0	6	6	2
D	28	15	9	5	1	0	10	13	0
E	46	39	21	17	1	1	2	0	5
F	28	20	13	7	0	0	8	0	0
G	14	5	2	3	0	0	0	8	12
H	43	17	13	4	2	0	9	13	0
I	28	23	7	10	8	1	5	0	0
J	82	54	25	12	9	8	18	6	4
K	35	30	13	7	10	0	4	3	26
L	118	67	50	17	0	0	6	20	25
M	40	35	17	8	0	0	5	2	0
N	35	33	22	11	10	0	1	0	10
O	22	20	10	3	12	0	0	2	0
Total – Sample[13]	**629**	**455**	**246**	**132**	**82**	**10**	**74**	**73**	**95**
Total – BC[14]	**1534**	**1105**	**597**	**320**	**199**	**24**	**181**	**178**	**232**

Key conclusions that can be drawn from the foregoing include:

- The supported work budget sponsors a wide range of work-related activity, and helps approximately 1100 people per year acquire and maintain employment.
- A large proportion of supported work clients remain in the program for longer than three years. The degree of independence of these clients varies widely.
- In many programs, clients access various components of programs concurrently.
- Unpaid work forms a large part of many programs, through considerable participation in volunteering and work experience placements. While some of these programs have appropriate limits on time and scope, many are inappropriately structured and operated. Particularly concerning are "volunteer" placements at private businesses that have no philanthropic quality and are essentially unpaid work placements; and work experience placements that have no specific goals or objectives and/or do not set out limits on the length of time that the client will participate in the placement.
- While agency-run programs that are legacies of supported work environments form a small minority of supported work programs, this is still clearly a preferred means of operating for some agencies.

[11] Includes clients who are in employment, job search, pre-employment training, and volunteering/work experience (where the agency includes volunteering as part of its supported employment program).
[12] Includes integrated positions, plus non-integrated employment or subcontract/work crew relationships.
[13] Totals exceed 100% where clients participate in more than one category concurrently.
[14] Presumptive, based on the sample agencies' proportion of the total supported work budget.

5.0 PROGRAM GOALS

As noted at the outset of this report, when the supported work program was first developed in the late 1980s, it set out four guiding objectives. The first three of these were conceptual and not easily measurable; the fourth established a three-year timeframe for helping clients reach independence in the workplace. These four program goals were the following:

1. To assist with the shift from vocational 'programming' to helping people find and maintain employment and careers in the community;
2. To provide flexible supports for people to be included in the workforce;
3. To promote and market the concept of supported work in the community; and
4. To create opportunities for individuals to work without additional supports within a 36-month period.

One of the stated objectives of this review was to assess whether agencies' organizational and individual goals objectives conform to the four larger program goals, and whether these objectives are carried out in practice.

First, it must be stated that agencies are not at all familiar with the stated objectives of the supported work program. While most agencies do – to varying degrees - tend to conform to the four objectives in practice, this is not generally the result of consciously linking program structures and practices with the four goals. Instead, conformance to program objectives seems to be more an organic result of the embracing of supported work principles and ideals, and part of the agency's philosophical approaches to encouraging client independence and community inclusion.

As noted, the first three of these goals are not easily measurable, and depend to some degree to a subjective analysis of each agency's particular supported work program. From our review, it is clear that most if not all agencies have built their programs around the desire to shift away from and offer alternatives to vocational programming, and to help people find and maintain employment in the community. To varying degrees and with different focuses, they all provide supports to assist with workforce inclusion and the all work to promote the concept of supported work in the community.

The question is to what degree the agencies pursue these goals. It is our conclusion that while most agencies put the ideal of supported work at the forefront of their work and are seeing to facilitate truly inclusive work placements, there is a remnant of old vocational programming approaches in some of the programs we reviewed.

In particular, agencies that have designed and implemented programs that revolve around agency-operated businesses do not seem to have fully embraced or conform to the objectives of moving away from vocational programming, providing flexible supports to help people be included in the general workforce, or promoting the concept of supported work. Rather, these programs seem to be more a legacy of a separate, sheltered workshop approach to employment for people with developmental disabilities.

Agencies such as agency C,N and to some degree agency O are particularly reliant on this approach. While all include "job club" type services as part of their supported work programs, the reality is that the focus of their work is on agency-managed programs that either directly employ clients in businesses such as paper shredding, or pay their clients on a contract basis to perform more occasional tasks on organized work crews.

While clients in these programs do receive the benefit of regularly scheduled work paid in conformance with legislated minimum standards, it cannot be said that these positions are integrated, or are very far removed from a vocational programming approach. Clients are not included in general workforces, integrated into community settings, or transitioning to independence.

All agencies include the second goal, to provide flexible supports for people to be included in the workforce, as a component of their supported work programs. All agencies use on-site job coaches to help clients become familiar with and comfortable in their positions out in the community, whether those positions are (as with the majority of programs) for legitimate independent work, or (as in the minority described above) for work crews, questionable "volunteering," or long-term "work experience" positions.

While most agencies structure their services to provide a roadmap to workplace independence, flexibility in attaining that independence is fundamental to all programs that we reviewed. Supports range from one-on-one, full time job coaching to intermittent, crisis-focussed bridging support – with every degree of support in between. All programs also offer pre-employment training of some sort, whether that takes the form of a time-limited, classroom based "module" approach (like agency L and J), less formal "job clubs" or workshops that are often peer- or individual-driven in their approach (like agency K and C) or individual-focussed training for specific goals (like agency A and H) . Even agencies that say they do not have a pre-employment program, such as agency M and agency B do in fact offer a myriad of pre-employment or job preparation services such as assistance with resume writing, help with articulating employment goals, and assessments of work skills and barriers.

While the lack of a dedicated budget aimed at the third goal – to promote and market the concept of supported work in the community – is one of the issues that many agencies raised as a barrier to the supported work program, in practice all agencies work towards this goal. Some agencies have made specific efforts in this area, with sophisticated and polished marketing materials. Agency L, D, J I, and H , for example, all use well-produced written materials, DVDs and testimonials as part of their structured and focussed marketing campaigns.

Other agencies have broadened their efforts, often utilizing local media to describe, de-mystify, and promote supported work in their communities. Agency M, L and D are among the leaders in this regard.

Most agencies, though, say that the most fruitful and effective means of promoting shared work is through one-on-one discussions with potential employers and the fostering of linkages with business leaders in the community. From formal presentations to Chambers of Commerce, to targeted "walk-ins" for specific businesses, to informal conversations with the businesses that job coaches and program administrators

encounter during the courses of their days, promoting supported work is a constant, if unmeasured, part of the work of all the agencies that took part in this review.

The fourth goal, to create opportunities to work independently within 36 months, was cited by the majority of agencies as the most common quantitative, measurable goal. Of the fifteen agencies that participated in the review, only two did not cite this as being the timeframe that they aim for to see substantial independence in their clients' work placements.

Some agencies, such as agency A and H are highly mindful of this objective and make clear efforts to keep clients to a three-year timeframe for attaining independence in the workplace. This approach, however, is not widely shared and the majority of agencies maintain clients in their programs well beyond the three year limit. The degree of support that these clients require varies widely – some agencies such as agency L, B and I maintain longer-term client contact on an informal basis. In practice they offer only intermittent support to long term clients, who have in fact achieved a high degree of independence.

Other programs make little effort to enforce any degree of increased independence within the three-year timeframe, and continue to offer high degrees of support without a clear transition plan to greater community integration. Agency G,C and O are examples of such programs, where, as one participant noted "no one goes off the program."

Most programs fall somewhere in between, with the vast majority of clients reaching substantial independence, but maintaining linkages and contact with the supported work program for assistance in dealing with specific challenges or changes in their workplaces. It was the strong view of all participants that this flexibility is one of the cornerstone strengths of supported work; that while movement though the program is to be encouraged, it is not necessary or helpful to ever completely discharge clients and force them to formally re-enrol if they have need for help in the future.

At the individual level, all programs we reviewed include individual goal setting and planning as the centre of their supported work approach. Agencies in general have embraced individual service plans, articulation of meaningful and achievable employment goals, and matching of individual skills with appropriate positions as the foundation of their approaches. The degree to which these individual goals are measurable varies widely – some set very specific goals (such as trying one work experience before obtaining work for three days a week); others are vaguer and less measurable (such as increasing self esteem).

Table 11, below, summarizes the sample agencies' approaches to goal setting and the articulation of objectives.

Table 11
Summary of goals / objectives

Agency	Program Goals Identified	Individual Goals Identified
A	• Clear and measurable program goals include increased participation in integrated work, provision of required supports.	• Individualized goals articulated • Measurable outcomes identified, assessed, and revised on a regular and ongoing basis

Agency	Program Goals Identified	Individual Goals Identified

B	Sets measurable outcomes for:
	• Effectiveness (increase the number of paid employment positions: 15 new paid placements per year)
	• Efficiency (minimize the percentage of people in long term non-paid positions: 5% or less in work experience of volunteer positions)
		• Based on individual goals identified and recorded in service plan
		• Includes measurable outcomes (surveys):
		  • Helping get/keep a job
		  • More income for clients
		  • Learning new skills (6 identified)
		  • Adequate support from coach
		  • Feeling comfortable and supported

C	• Contract doesn't specific supported work program requirements or goals.
	• Developed program goals:
	  • Paid employment at no less than minimum wage
	  • Positive community relationships
	• Integrated placements not a focus
		• Based on individual. Generally, either community volunteering or seeking employment.
		• If latter, provide find people work in house, or support to work out in community

D	• Help individuals prepare for, find and keep community based work placements	• Success outcomes include:
		  • Achieving paid work
		  • Trying more than 1 experience
		  • Returning to school
		  • Volunteering – with clear expectations and restrictions
		• If none met – excused from program

E	• Provide employment opportunities for adults who want to learn new skills that will help them work in their communities. • Secure employment for clients with the same pay and same expectations as for the general community.	• Set and document individual based employment goals, with strategies to achieve them

F	Program guided by:
	• All individuals should have opportunity to engage in activities that are meaningful to them
	• The free agency of the individual should be respected
		• Outcomes depend on individual goals and abilities:
		  • Some satisfied with volunteering
		  • Some want to access training/education (referred out)
		  • Some satisfied with part time work
		  • Some seek full time work

G	Goals for services: • Support to individuals for planning and decision making • Assessment, marketing, interview and training supports, work supports and monitoring.	• Individual based goal determination • SMART goals – CARF approach • 6 months review of goals and objectives, with reassessment and retooling of strategies as needed • No expectation of phasing out
H	Funding contract sets 6 goals: • Safety and security • Full citizenship through inclusion • Individual based planning • Individual based decision making • Access to timely and appropriate supports • Needs met through flexible, innovative and creative supports and services	Increasing, maintaining and/or maximizing: • Awareness of and participation in employment • Job readiness skills and abilities • Enabling movement to less supports • Increasing number/duration of employment/volunteer placements • Choice in personal and employment matters • Monitoring progress in vocational training • Supporting short term work experiences
I	2007 Program goals: • 7-10 new paid jobs • Set up and manage shredding operation • Develop and achieve media/ promotions plan	Goal for individuals: • Paid employment outcomes, based on individually-determined goals

Agency	Program Goals Identified	Individual Goals Identified
	• Pursue provincial association for Supported Employment	
J	• Place people with disabilities into innovative and inclusive employment opportunities. • Goals based on 8 "desired contract outcomes" set out in CLBC funding contract, including personalized plans; development and maintenance of personal relationships.	Increased skills in: • Pre-employment: resume writing, interviewing, appropriate presentation • Employment related life skills: budgeting banking, reporting income, personal care, etc. • Social skills: personal safety, interpersonal relationships, resolving conflicts, etc.
K	• "Promote inclusion and independence by assisting individual to contribute to, and be involved in the community by volunteer or paid employment"	• Individuals: soft goals such as showing positive attitude understanding job seeking, interacting appropriately. • Agency is only funded for pre-employment services.
L	• To provide individualized, effective, efficient and accessible services\ • To provide a range of interesting, challenging and rewarding work environments	• Individual outcomes determined and measured with CIMS in the form of Target Outcome Measures

M	• Transition from previous service provider
	• Establish career planning for clients, not just job finding
	• Secure real, paid jobs in integrated settings
	• Focus on job placement and onsite training and support
	• Provide individual and group training for basic social skills
		• Goals are dependant on individual wants and needs. Can include:
		  • Securing paid work in the community
		  • Meeting new people
		  • Increasing in independence
		  • Remaining at job with increased or decreased hours
		  • Changing jobs

N	• Lack of clear, articulated goals • Mixed focus: workshop, work crew, agency operated businesses, integrated employment placements	Generally, clients start with "therapeutic work" and training allowance, then transition to working on work crew or agency operated business if appropriate. Then, if employee desires, will help to find integrated work in the community.
O	10 specific objectives with measurable outcomes, including goals of: • Maximizing number of persons who obtain integrated employment (3 integrated employment placements per year) • Maximize opportunities for staff training (6 per year) • Maximize satisfaction of individuals, families and stakeholders (95% satisfaction rate)	Help individuals who want a job, to get a job.

6.0 PROGRAM STRENGTHS & OPPORTUNITIES

The supported work program is applied in a wide variety of ways across the province, in diverse regions and communities that must address specific challenges and capitalize on local opportunities. It is also a provincially administered program of CLBC, and as such it is possible to outline a number of common themes and trends. The following sections outline some of the key strengths, opportunities, and challenges that are currently experienced by the supported work program across British Columbia.

6.1 Strengths

Throughout the course of this review, one of the driving objectives was to identify what is working well with the current way that supported work programs are structured, organized, and operated. Consideration of program strengths is a fundamental component in determining the overall direction of how supported work programs can optimally be delivered in British Columbia. This section identifies key strengths that have been identified through an analysis of the available information, first hand observation, and the viewpoints of the agencies that took part in this review.

Individualized support model

Ensuring that individuals are job-ready before placing them in a work situation is a fundamental strength of many of the supported work programs that were considered in this review. This is illustrated in the more successful programs by a move away from a vocational support model to the provision of an individualized support model. Although both of these have a "train and place" approach, it is our view that better outcomes result from the latter approach.

Related to this factor is that many successful programs include and emphasize social skills training as part of their individualized approach. Addressing and improving social competence has proved to be a necessary support strategy before and during job acquisition. Assisting individuals to identify how work changes their life and how to interact with supervisors and coworkers in order to improve job task performance is a clear strength that is offered by supported work programs at their best.

On site support

All agencies emphasized the benefit and value of providing one-on-one, on-site job coaching for clients in new work situations. While the degree and intensity of this coaching varies widely, the variance is due to the specific needs of individual clients, with the ultimate goal of ensuring a successful transition to independent employment. The evidence suggests that agencies are generally quite successful in meeting this objective. Many agencies contrasted this facet of the supported work program with other programs that do not offer on-site support to clients: other programs that provide employment assistance to people with disabilities tend not to offer such individualized on-site support. It was the experience and view of many participants in this review that a failure to provide intensive support at the beginning of a new job placement would not serve clients well. All participants highly valued this facet of supported work, and many described it as the defining component of the program.

On-site support is also valued in that it encourages employers to work harder to accommodate the needs of clients, rather than simply give up on the program if challenges should arise with a particular client. Rather than allowing the employer an "easy out", on-site support means that both employee and employer are able to immediately access assistance from a resource that has specific expertise in ensuring that challenges are worked through. For the participating agencies and their clients, this support is key.

Efficient enrolment

Participants also valued the relatively straightforward and simple process for getting clients enrolled and involved in CLBC's supported work program. Many have had experience with both the MCFD/CLBC system and the MEIA system for supported employment, and say that clients are much better served under CLBC. CLBC supported work programs are not characterized by an overly standardized, formalized process as with MEIA, whose intake, assessment, eligibility confirmation and ongoing data management requirements are seen as overly onerous when compared to the CLBC process. This is in part due to the closer relationships that agencies have with their CLBC representatives, and the ability to work together to ensure that appropriate clients are quickly enrolled in appropriate services.

A clear business approach

The agencies that, in our view, are most successful with their supported work programs, are those that focus strongly on securing and maintaining employment for their client, and focus on doing it well. These agencies have a clear business focus, and while they may have access to other related programs and services, they do not try to be all things to all clients. For these agencies, the business model does not include therapeutic work, ongoing long-term volunteering, or the creation of client-supported businesses owned and operated by the agency. Rather, the business model clearly focussed on getting clients prepared for work in the general workforce, assisting them to obtain that work, and a helping to ensure that they keep the work. The strongest programs we reviewed were characterized by a clear separation from day, residential, and services; where agencies treated supported work a business and expected clients to do the same, always with appropriate supports in place.

Real work for real pay

Agencies with particularly strong supported work programs commonly take the approach that clients are looking for a job like any other person, so should not look for or expect special allowances. Put another way, one participant said, "this isn't a charity job, it's a *job,*" and much of their work focused on encouraging the employee, the employer, and coworkers in the workplace to think in this same way.

Many agencies also said that focusing on real work for real pay is a cornerstone of their success. Very few supported work programs encourage the use of subsidized positions, for example, because it has been their shared experience that when subsidies expire (generally after six months), the job also meets the same fate. The strongest programs are those that do not encourage or look for these exceptions, but instead place clients in positions where the work and the pay are a realistic and integrated part of the workplace.

Job carving

The ability to "job carve' – that is, to take portions of different jobs and create a job description that is suitable for a given client – is widely seen as a fundamental factor for the success of agencies' supported work programs. Explaining the potential benefits of job carving is an important part of the marketing plans of many agencies, and involves staff going to potential employers and helping them see how existing job duties or functions that are not being completed under existing structures could be collected into a new job description that meets the needs of both employer and employee. This approach is particularly suited to many clients with developmental disabilities, who value and respond to a task-by-task approach. Through job carving, employers are often brought to the position of being willing to consider a more creative approach to getting their work done – and in the process, a new job is created for supported work client. Job carving is a key factor in securing positions that are suitable for employers *and* employees.

Long-term relationships

Working directly with employers and fostering ongoing long-term relationships was commonly identified as key to a program's success. Those agencies that have had the best results in securing integrated employment positions for their clients consistently pointed to the value of long-term relationships with contacts in their communities as a fundamental factor in their success. Connections to the business community, fostered, built up, and nurtured over time, have been particularly influential in raising supported work program profiles and contributing to high employment rates. In addition, employers that have long-term relationships are more likely to contact the agency if something becomes challenging with the job placement, rather than just giving up on the client.

Similarly, long-term relationships with clients are also valued. This is a factor that may be easier in smaller centers, but keeping in contact over a long period of time and ensuring that the client knows that they can always contact the agency for assistance was commonly highlighted as an important reason that supported work placements work out in the long run.

Structural flexibility

Many agencies highlighted their ability to act flexibly as a key factor to their programs' successes. In particular, global funding contracts are highly valued, as they are seen as providing both flexibility and required infrastructure for training and support programs. Many agencies expressed strong reservations about a move to individualized funding, as they felt it would impact their ability to offer stability, predictability, and flexible ongoing support to their clients. However, it should not be taken that this approach is contraindicative to outcomes-based planning and contract development, which has been widely adopted and is a cornerstone of the majority of supported work programs that took part in this review.

Job market

Although not a structural factor, the current strength and vibrancy of the job market across the province has provided unprecedented opportunities for supported work programs. While agencies recognize that this may be a temporary situation, many of them are taking advantage of the opportunity to place clients into entry-level positions

that would normally be taken by people without developmental disabilities. Part of this strategy is to raise the profile of supported work programs, broaden the experience of coworkers, and illustrate to a wide audience the potential for supported workers throughout their communities.

6.2 Opportunities

Along with the existing, more structural strengths of the program, a number of opportunities were also identified that have the potential of improving the administration, operation, and ability of the program to reach its overall objectives. This section sets out key opportunities that were identified in the course of this review, arising from a review of the available information and interviews with participating agencies.

Transitioning into supported work

As many agencies noted, an entire generation of people with developmental disabilities has now had the benefit of education in integrated settings. One of the results of this fact is that youths transitioning out of school have much higher expectations with respect to finding and maintaining employment. Despite this positive development, very few programs in the province have well developed linkages with school systems, and there is a large unmet opportunity to provide greater outreach to the 15- to18-years age group.

While it is challenging to link youths into non-education programs as they transition to adulthood, there is a clear opportunity to work more closely with schools and CLBC to help ease the transition. Many agencies also noted that these linkages would be particularly welcome to help make early assessments about the appropriateness of supported work services for people transitioning into adulthood, as there is a gap where the "social work" or case management approach of MCFD used to provide greater background information about clients.

Community image and public relations

Many agencies are already taking advantage of opportunities in their communities for public relations to enhance their community profiles. Agencies such as agency M, L and I are leaders in this area, and have maximized opportunities to raise their profiles through printed materials, public relations campaigns, creating public information spots on local cable channels and attending at job fairs and job markets.

Most agencies identified public relations as an area that they would like to enhance, but have not yet had the opportunity or the budget to do so. Agencies also noted the difficulty of creating and maintaining the momentum behind public relations initiatives in isolation, and expressed interest in a more centrally managed or funded approach to this opportunity. Those agencies that have implemented community relations activities all report success in engaging the interest of and increasing opportunities to work with employers. Greater community awareness and acceptance of people with developmental disabilities is a legacy of integration and education, and provides a clear base on which to maximize this opportunity.

Linking marketing and coaching

All agencies currently structure their programs so that supported work staff performs both job coaching and job marketing duties. This has been a conscious design decision, as the linkage between the marketing and coaching aspects of the job provides an ongoing opportunity to work with employers on a long-term basis and to discuss and describe the supported work program in depth. Agencies highly value this ability to serve multiple objectives with one position, and report that this is a frequently source for the identification of and capitalization on new work opportunities. Although currently there appears to be a movement – mostly through income assistance supported work programs – to separate marketing and coaching activities, participants in this review were strongly of the view that this would remove a valuable opportunity to expand the reach of supported work, and would be a detriment to the program and to clients.

Organizing information sharing

While many agencies have developed strong, innovative, and efficient supported work programs, they have generally done so in isolation and from the ground up - there has been, and continues to be, very little information sharing or opportunities for networking amongst the agencies that provide supported work service. Participants in this review consistently expressed a desire for a more organized and structural means of meeting together or circulating information about promising practices related to supported work. Some agencies have put this at the top of their agendas and are working independently to foster greater communications, but this is an area where an organization like the BC Association for Community Living could play a more meaningful role.

Unionized worksites

A good example of where more formalize information sharing would potentially reap benefits is with respect to the engagement of unionized workplaces in supported work placements. While some agencies pointed to this as one of their major and ongoing challenges, others highlighted their successes in this area as one of their cornerstone accomplishments. Sharing experiences and information in order to more fully include unionized worksites in the supported work program is a clear opportunity can be maximized, particularly in light of the current strength of the economy and job market.

Self-employment and micro enterprises

Finally, while some agencies have embraced the notion of self-employment as an opportunity for clients, many others sound a note of caution when considering this as a focus for future work opportunities. A few high-profile success stories have led some agencies to consider this as a focus for future work, and while client self-determination is a clear benefit of self-employment, there are also considerable challenges. These include gaps in ensuring long-term support, set-up costs, and monitoring of such things as compliance with labour and tax laws. Unless there is considerable family or caregiver support, self-employment is a highly risky concern that may suit only a small minority of supported work clients.

Similarly, a number of agencies noted the opportunity that is provided by the emergence of micro-enterprises. These agencies were particularly drawn by the ability

to manage a large group of clients who “own” the business themselves, thereby mitigating some of the more stringent requirements of employment standards legislation. However, as with self-employment, micro enterprises do not appear to be well placed to serve the larger employment interests of a wide range of clients. They also require considerable investment in terms of business development, administration, location and payment for space, and other costs associated with running a business. Any move towards self-employment and micro-enterprise should be undertaken only with serious examination of the costs and benefits of these models, the ability to provide services clients with a wide range of abilities, and consideration of whose interests are truly being served.

7.0 PROGRAM CHALLENGES

Along with strengths and opportunities, the identification of challenges is equally important in understanding how the supported work program helps to engage individuals and employers. This section sets out some of the main factors that may serve as challenges or threats to the optimal inclusion of individuals with developmental disabilities in the workforce. Factors that impede employer engagement are also described. For ease of reference, challenges are organized first by those that are more structural or organizational, followed by those that are more related to the individuals that supported work programs support.

7.1 Structural / organizational challenges

Ad hoc "supported" work

One of the challenging results of British Columbia's robust economy is an unanticipated rush to take advantage of the very strong job market throughout the province. There are two sides to this equation: employers who are in desperate need of help and are willing to bend employment standards in order to secure assistance; and programs that will place clients into employment situations without sufficient or appropriate support.

Of particular concern is a growing tendency among programs to flood the market with people who cannot meet performance expectations or do not receive the supports that are required to ensure a long-term successful work placements. Many participating agencies were particularly concerned about day programs that have begun to place clients in work situations – essentially running "supported work" programs off the sides of desks. Individuals in these programs are being "supported" by organizations, day programs or even group homes that do not provide appropriate on-site support, best practices, trained staff, guidelines, or understanding of labour law.

The growth of these *ad hoc* supported work programs is a serious challenge for legitimate programs. Should problems arise with placements, there are few supports to help clients get through challenges, and employers may be left with a negative view of supported employment. The risk is considerable, as the success of the supported work program highly dependent on employer and community goodwill and open mindedness.

"Volunteering"

The employer side of the heated job market is reflected in a growing trend towards "volunteering" as part of supported work programs. Many agencies noted a growth trend in volunteering as tokenism under a different name. This is particularly true for supported work volunteering positions in private enterprises and businesses – for example, it is not proper that clients should "volunteer" at Starbucks as a number of agencies noted.

The tendency of programs and employers to utilize long-term, inappropriate volunteering is exacerbated by a lack of standardized guidelines. Amongst supported work program, there is a lack of clarity regarding what is and is not acceptable in terms

of volunteering or work experiences, and some of these do not appear to be in compliance with employment standards laws. As many agencies highlighted, businesses that are very needful of help will bend rules, often to the detriment of the clients that are supposed to be served by the supported work program.

"Numbers in, numbers out"

Agencies also spoke with concern about supported work programs for people with disabilities that focus more and more on the numbers of clients that are enrolled and "graduated" from programs. While agencies all recognize the importance of serving as many clients as possible, they were united in their view that a crucial element in long-term employment success is an individual, needs-based approach. They spoke with concern about programs run through other ministries (e.g. the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance) or levels of government (e.g. federally-funded programs such as TheoBC) that provide little or no on-site support, or support that is strictly time-limited before clients are deemed independent and removed from the program. Many agencies report, in fact, that these same clients often end up losing their jobs and coming to the CLBC-funded programs that offer a more realistic, individual, and flexible approach to supported employment.

Pre-enrolment information about clients

Related to the lack of linkages with the school system is a growing lack of pre-enrolment knowledge about the individual abilities, challenges, histories and outlooks of clients. Particularly in larger centres, but to a degree throughout the province, there is a lack of knowledge about the individual characteristics of the people who are e referred to supported work programs. More people are being referred without proper assessments from CLBC, sometimes inappropriately and without a clear sense of what the client is ready for in terms of seeking and maintaining work. This is challenging for both the individuals in question and the programs to which they are referred. Individuals may have unrealistic expectations and face inevitable disappointment as they are declined entry or rejected from the program. As more referrals come from CLBC or the school system with only a name and phone number as file information, it becomes the responsibility of the agency to determine if the client is eligible and appropriate for services.

Employment programs performing beyond scope

Many participating agencies report taking on more and more support roles that are necessary for successful supported work placements, even though they are not strictly funded to do so. Independent living, life skills training, and daily supports are necessary, but many supported employment programs are not funded for these service. Nevertheless, job coaches often find themselves teaching time management, proper nutrition, proper attire, hygiene and medication compliance in order to help ensure the client's success in the workplace. This is recognized as a necessary part of a supported employment program, but the lack of official recognition and funding for these components is challenging for many agencies.

Advertising

As noted elsewhere, while the success of supported employment often relies on community engagement and knowledge about the program, agencies are challenged

by the lack of ability to "advertise" their services – not only with employers, but also with schools, other social service agencies and the community in general. There is a lack of funding and expertise to raise public awareness and encourage the linkages that would help broaden the base of employer support and foster wider partnerships. In the face of this challenge, many agencies have developed and implemented innovative and cost-effective communications campaigns based largely on community information-sharing media and opportunities. This is an area in which greater inter-agency communication, perhaps fostered by a group like BCACL, could play a valuable role in sharing and improving practices.

Funding and support

Funding levels were cited by most agencies as a structural concern, with a common complaint that there is insufficient fudging to cover administrative needs such as report writing and record keeping. Many agencies also felt the lack of a dedicated supported work supervisor was detrimental, providing an ongoing challenge to optimal program development and service delivery.

In general, smaller, privately run agencies have a sense that there is inequity in funding levels between them and the larger unionized agencies. Private agencies also highlighted their inability to access funding from organizations such as the United Way or the Vancouver Foundation as a challenge that contributes to larger funding inequities. This is especially challenging in smaller communities, where non-profit agencies tend not to focus on supported employment, thus leaving clients underserved. Finally, some programs note that staff wage rates are low compared to MEIA supported employment programs, making the recruitment and retention of qualified staff an ongoing challenge.

7.2 Challenges to individual engagement in supported work

While it is difficult to classify challenges as being in one category or another, the following issues relate more to the individual characteristics and challenges that are presented by individuals, families, and caregivers that access supported work programs. They are no less important that the structural/organizational challenges, although perhaps more difficult to define or address.

Family expectations

A challenge for many supported work programs is an expectation from families, caregivers, and individuals that supported employment is essentially a supplement to an education program or a day program; that programs can identify and obtain very intermittent placements that will work around the other commitments of the individual. Families and caregivers may approach the program for assistance in obtaining employment, but lose interest or support when it impacts the ability of the individual in question to take part in other events like sports events, vacations, respite, social activities, etc. Many clients and caregivers are accustomed to the day program approach, which is very flexible in this regard, and it is challenging to change their approach so it is more conducive to the needs of a workplace.

Transition to adulthood

As noted elsewhere, for individuals with developmental disabilities the transition from the school system into adulthood is not necessarily a smooth one. Currently, there are insufficient linkages and between the education system, childhood developmental disabilities services, and adult services. As one agency summarized: "every year in May there is a panic, as people realize the childhood supports and programs will end. No one keeps a list of who will be coming out of school, and there is no sense of the numbers or needs of clients that might be referred to the supported work program."

The lack of transition supports and mechanisms from the school system to supported work means that many clients either go to drop-ins or attend day programs just to preserve predictability in their days. Agencies miss opportunities to provide extended intake, clients do not receive appropriate services, and employers are not able to fully access the potential pool of available employees through supported work.

Relevant training

Securing useful, functional, job-related training opportunities for individuals is highly challenging for most agencies. Supported work clients graduated from school with great hopes and expectations, but generally have not had the benefit of any training for the basic skills that entry-level positions are likely to require. Most agencies' supported employment programs are not designed or funded to provide these services, which makes securing a meaningful work position more challenging. Employers are asked to think of supported work employees as being like an employee like any other. In return, employers expect a basic level of training for skills such as sweeping or washing dishes, and they aren't often willing to spend a lot of time teaching these very basic skills.

Programs also report that it is difficult to access the generic programs that are necessary for some jobs – for example, Foodsafe and some HRDC programs. The primary issue is that funding is not available to support people in enrolling into these programs. When funding *is* identified to support attendance, the delivery often does not meet the needs of employees with developmental disabilities - workshops are too long, and the attendance of a job coach is often required to break down or rephrase information and concepts in order to be understandable.

MEIA benefits

Currently, the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance allows an earnings exemption of $500 for a person with disabilities (or $750 per couple), before deducting from monthly income assistance. After $500 per month, earnings are deducted dollar for dollar from income assistance payments. Many participants expressed a preference for the former system, which had a lower absolute limit, but which allowed proportional deductions when the limit was reached.

Clients, families, and caregivers are highly cognizant of this limit, and many will consciously decline work in that earns in excess of $500 per month. In particular, clients and families often fear they will be impacted in the long term: if they earn over $500, reduce or eliminate income assistance, then lose their job in the future they are afraid that they won't be able to re-qualify for full income assistance. Working with MEIA to communicate requirements is often cited as a general challenge for agencies

– but particularly for clients, who have difficulty understanding reporting requirements and long-term implications of supported work earnings.

Transportation

Transportation to and from job sites is challenging for individuals, families, caregivers and agencies that provide supported work services. Family, friends and caregivers may be unable to transport people to and from work, and public transportation options outside of bigger centres very rarely coincide with the travel requirements of workers. Many centres – particularly smaller communities – have insufficient or no public transportation systems, which serves as a major barrier to individuals' participation in the workforce. While most supported work programs do not include transportation services, many agencies find that themselves informally or unofficially transporting clients to and from work on a more and more consistent basis. This is not only challenging from a resource perspective, but could also have considerable liability implications.

Social aspect of work

For many individuals in supported work, loneliness in the workplace is a significant and ongoing challenge – people miss their friends. Although the optimal operation of a supported work placement would mean the development of natural supports and friendships, building these relationships in a workplace is not easy. Job coaches and other structural supports can only foster this aspect of work life to a limited degree, and for many clients the lack of friends is the main factor that results in an unsuccessful employment experience.

Conversely, many clients are accustomed to leading very busy, very structured lives with a high degree of social interaction. Intense scheduling leaves only a very specific, time-limited period where the client is available for work. This lack of flexibility and focus on other social activities is often untenable for both employer and client – and clients will often choose their social commitments over work.

Education – supported work as an option

Finally, while there has been a great deal of education about the abilities of people with developmental disabilities over the past years, it is still a challenge for many employers to see the possibilities presented by hiring an employee from the supported work program. Too often, employers still make assumptions about what clients cannot do, rather than considering what they can. While employers are typically very accepting of accommodation to address physical disabilities, it is the experience of most participants that employers are rarely as easily open to accommodating developmental disabilities. Participants consistently identified one-on-one education and marketing as the most effective way of addressing this challenge.

8.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As noted at the outset of this report, this review sought to assess the key characteristics of the supported work program of CLBC, by examining a representative group of fifteen agencies' programs. The budgets of the representative group's programs constitute almost half of the total CLBC supported work budget, and are appropriately varied in terms of size, location, organization and focus. This allowed us to draw, with as high degree of confidence as possible, conclusions about the provincial program as a whole based on the representative sample.

The considerable range in the characteristics of supported work programs and services makes it challenging to reach overarching findings about the program as a whole. Representative agencies included those that focus solely on employment and those that include supported employment as part of a larger program; privately owned and operated agencies and those that are not-for-profit societies; large unionized agencies and those that are smaller and non-unionized; and agencies that are located in large urban environments, smaller urban centers, and more isolated towns. Programs themselves ranged from those that offer a wide range of softer, pre-employment and social skills training to those that essentially operate as employment agencies; and reflect a very wide difference in terms of the levels of clients' abilities within each of the programs.

Despite these challenges, it is our conclusion that the four overall goals of the supported work program are in fact relevant to today's circumstance and are generally carried out in practice. Most if not all agencies have in fact built their programs around the desire to shift away from and offer alternatives to vocational programming, and to help people find and maintain employment in the community (Objective 1). To varying degrees and with different focuses, they all provide supports to assist with workforce inclusion (Objective 2) and they all work to promote the concept of supported work in the community (Objective 3).

The fourth objective, to create opportunities to work independently within 36 months, is used by the vast majority of agencies as a goal for their clients. However, the ability of clients to maintain linkages and contact with the supported work program for assistance in dealing with specific challenges or changes in their workplaces is a cornerstone strength of CLBC's supported work program, and distinguishes it from other MEIA or federally-funded programs.

Even allowing for this flexibility, however, there is a lack of clear objectives in many programs that took part in this review. Some clients participate in supported work without any expectation of skills development or progress towards independence, and without any time limits on enrolment. Some programs operate without clear expectation in terms of the number of clients to be served, or how they will progress through system. While there are certainly benefits to maintaining flexibility in terms of ongoing supports and expectations, this makes it difficult to assess if agencies are in fact performing well or not against objective expectations.

Taking all of this into consideration, the following recommendations are made:

1. Retain and better communicate to agencies the objective of three years to independent work.

   A three-year timeframe appears to be realistic and is in fact the goal upon which most programs are built. This is not universal, however, and it is recommended that CLBC clearly communicate to all agencies with supported work programs that this is an objective around which both organizational and individual supported work plans should be built.

2. Retain flexibility in the three-year goal.

   A key factor in the ongoing success of clients' work placements is the retention of *ad hoc*, informal communications between the agency and the client and/or employer, past the three-year limit. This allows agencies to quickly address challenges that arise and maintain the client in employment, rather than risking loss of the position and formal re-entry into the program. Strictly imposing a three-year limit is not seen as realistic for this population and would work against one of the fundamental strengths of the program.

3. Retain structural flexibility.

   Any move towards a more MEIA style of supported work program format, such as highly formalized enrolment, communication and documentation processes should be undertaken with caution and prudence. Instead, it is recommended that CLBC focus on the strengths that differentiate its supported work program from a more institutional approach: flexibility in the supports that are offered; an individual focus to planning and implementation; the provision of on-site support; and the availability of ongoing intermittent assistance where needed.

4. Review contracts with agencies.

   Our review revealed an extremely wide range in the form, content, and expectations of CLBC's funding contracts for supported work programs. Some are very specific both in terms of expectations for individual clients' objectives (e.g. securing independent employment) and program scope (e.g. number of clients to be served). Others are vague and non-descript, and fail to set clear expectations. It is recommended that CLBC undertake a review of all contracts to ensure that appropriate expectations are in place and are monitored on a regular basis.

5. Assist agencies to transition away from a vocational approach.

   As noted in this report, some agencies have not fully made the transition towards supported employment as a means of fostering independent, integrated work placements in the general community. Particular attention should be paid to agencies that continue to utilized work crews, inappropriate "volunteering", and interminable work experience placements as components of their programming. Part of this work should include the clear communication that funding to agency-operated businesses that do not work towards community inclusion and are remnants of a sheltered workshop approach to employment will be phased out.

6. Create communications links and networking opportunities.

   Currently, most agencies with supported work programs operate in isolation, often developing and implementing programs from the ground up instead of sharing and adapting the good ideas and practices that are already in place. It is recommended that CLBC – working with agencies such as the BC Association for Community Living – build on individual initiatives to disseminate best practices and operational ideas to agencies throughout the province.

7. Review the inappropriate placement of clients in work situations.

   It is recommended that CLBC undertake a review of the reported growing tendency among some organizations to in appropriately place clients in work situations – essentially running "supported work" programs off the sides of their desks. The strong labour market has led some organizations to place clients in work situations without appropriate on-site support, best practices, trained staff, guidelines, or understanding of labour law. It is recommended that CLBC work with its agencies to fully understand the scope of the practice and ensure that it does not put the entire supported employment program at risk.