

## Getting to Work

CQL | The Council on Quality and Leadership reports the latest findings from the National Personal Outcome Measures® Database — with a focus on outcomes and work.

We explored the interplay between the outcome measure “**People choose where they work**”, other outcomes, and overall quality of life.

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*Does the presence of the work outcome predict or influence other outcomes?*

*Which other outcomes predict or influence the presence of the work outcome?*

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Our analysis supports findings from a variety of researchers on the important role of employment in the lives of all people, including people with disabilities.

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Researchers in a variety of fields in human services and across the general population have studied the status and impact of employment. They reveal one clear, universal theme: Work provides a source of income, an opportunity to meet other people, a sense of accomplishment and self-esteem. Finding and choosing a job and a career is an important life decision.

Yet, we also know that for most people with disabilities employment remains an unmet life goal.

**The National Council on Disability** reports: “The employment rate of working-age people with disabilities remains only half that of people without disabilities ... The reason is not that people with disabilities do not want to work. Two-thirds of non-employed people with disabilities say they would prefer to be working.”<sup>1</sup>

**The Alliance for Full Participation (AFP)** is a formal partnership of leading disabilities organizations (including CQL) with a common vision — to create a better and more fulfilling quality of life for people with developmental disabilities. In 2009 AFP announced its new campaign, “Real Jobs – It’s Everybody’s Business,” and its goal of doubling the employment rate for people with developmental disabilities by 2015.

AFP states “For people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, ‘real jobs’ means an end to the sheltered workshops and the new reality of fully integrated employment for all people. Real jobs means real paychecks, which enable individuals to afford housing, food, clothing and the supports and services necessary for them to live – and work – in the communities of their choice. In a very concrete way, real jobs will support people to live out their dreams and aspirations, a goal we can all identify with. Unfortunately, the employment rate for people with developmental disabilities is only 22%, compared to 79% for typical Americans. This has forced people who could live independently to depend heavily on others to define and support their choices.”<sup>2</sup>

**The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI)** For the past 20 years, ICI’s Access to Integrated Employment, the national data collection project on day and employment outcomes funded by the Administration on Developmental Disabilities, has described the nature of day and employment services for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence employment outcomes at an individual, service provider, and state policy level.

ICI’s *National Report on Employment Services and Outcomes, 2008* concluded: “More individuals continue to be supported in facility-based employment, earning sub-minimum wage, than in integrated employment. A disproportionate number of individuals with disabilities work in low wage settings as compared to the general population. In the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) system, the gap between earnings of adults with disabilities at closure and personal income in the general population is large and widening over time.”<sup>3</sup>

**The Gallup Organization’s** new book *Wellbeing: The Five Essential Elements* by Tom Rath and Jim Harter describes five universal, interconnected elements that shape our lives: Career Wellbeing, Social Wellbeing, Financial Wellbeing, Physical Wellbeing, and Community Wellbeing.

The authors report “Career Wellbeing is probably the most underestimated of the elements. When you ask people what affects their wellbeing most, they think of health and wealth. Even though people spend more of their waking hours at work than anywhere else, people underestimate how work influences their overall wellbeing and daily experience... work is not only a core part of your time use on a day-to-day basis, but also of your identity as a person... Work is crucial to how we relate to people and evaluate our lives at a very basic level.”<sup>4</sup>

**CQL | The Council on Quality and Leadership** has been talking to individuals with disabilities about their life priorities through our Personal Outcome Measures® interview methodology for over 20 years. We have collected data from over 7,100 people on 21 personally defined outcome measures. Taken together these measures offer a look into Quality of Life for each person.<sup>5</sup>

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In line with others asking important questions about the role and impact of work, CQL conducted an analysis of the Personal Outcome Measures® database with a focus on the outcome “**People choose where they work.**”

We asked the following questions:

- In what ways does the presence of this outcome predict or influence other dimensions of Quality of Life?
- Which other outcomes predict or influence the outcome on work?

### Findings

The outcome **People choose where they work** is a strong component of total number of outcomes present. It ranks in the top five along with People exercising rights, People are treated fairly, People interact with other members of the community, and People choose where and with whom they live.

Taken together these five outcomes present a cluster of critical elements with the greatest impact on personal Quality of Life. They reveal key underlying themes of choice, respect, and community relationships. We see parallels in our findings and the Gallup Wellbeing data for the general population. It should not be surprising that for people with disabilities, overall Quality of Life is enhanced by the same things as other people in society.

Our data offers compelling evidence of the significance of work for people with disabilities.

- People who are able to choose where they work have significantly more outcomes than those who don't. This is true of total number of outcomes, as well as the likelihood of other specific outcomes being present on their lives.
- Outcomes with the highest correlation with work:
  - People live in integrated environments
  - People choose where and with whom they live
- People who choose where they work are also likely to experience these outcomes:
  - People exercise rights
  - People choose where and with whom they live
  - People interact with other members of the community
  - People have friends

- When people *do not* choose where they work, the following outcomes are also highly likely to be *not* present in their lives:
  - People choose where and with whom they live
  - People have friends
  - People perform different social roles
  - People live in integrated environments

Looking at our data and the work of others, the case for meaningful and valued employment for people with disabilities is clear and compelling. Our beliefs and principles have long held that work contributes to personal, financial, and social success. This analysis of Personal Outcome Measures® and Choosing Work demonstrates the truth in our convictions.

An analysis of the Personal Outcome Measures® database of over 7,100 interviews with people in the past 15 years indicates that no single outcome emerges as a conclusive variable in facilitating personally defined quality of life. While the identification of a single silver bullet is inconclusive, the data does indicate that choice of employment, choice of where and with whom one lives, living in an integrated environment, having friends, and exercising rights together influence personal quality of life. Self-direction rests on the opportunity to make basic choices about work and home, having the supports of friends and the freedom to exercise basic rights.

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### References

- <sup>1</sup> National Council on Disability (2007). **Empowerment for Americans with Disabilities: Breaking Barriers to Careers and Full Employment.** Washington DC: Author.
- <sup>2</sup> Alliance for Full Participation (2010). **Website.** Washington, DC.
- <sup>3</sup> Butterworth, John; Smith, Frank; Hall, Allison; Migliore, Alberto & Winsor, Jean (2008). **The National Report on Employment Services and Outcomes, 2008.** Boston: Institute for Community Inclusion.
- <sup>4</sup> Rath, Tom & Harter, Jim (2010). **Wellbeing: The Five Essential Elements.** New York: Gallup Press.
- <sup>5</sup> CQL (2005). **Personal Outcome Measures®.** Towson, MD: Author.

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### Additional Resources

Alliance for Full Participation

<http://www.allianceforfullparticipation.org/>

American Community Survey – Employment Data

<http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/laborfor/laborforce.html>

APSE

<http://www.apse.org/>

CQL Knowledge Portal on Employment

<http://ecommunity.c-q-l.org/library.htm?mode=view&did=686&lid=5&wf=17>

Institute for Community Inclusion

[http://www.communityinclusion.org/topic.php?topic\\_id=5](http://www.communityinclusion.org/topic.php?topic_id=5)

Real People, Real Jobs: Stories from the Front Lines

<http://www.realworkstories.org/>

State Employment Leadership Network

<http://selnmembers.org/content/view/13/113/>

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<http://www.thecouncil.org/dataquarterly.aspx>

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