The Uniquely Abled Project

The Uniquely Abled Academy Replication Guide

Element 0 – The UAA Replication Guide

Element 0.1NL - Ten Elements Summary

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Note: tThe links have been deactivated in this public version of this document.

A summary of each of the ten required elements of a successful vocational training program is in this section. Each element has a main document, together with associated subtopic documents, exhibits, and links to other resources. Click on the title (link) for each Element to go to the main document for that element.

Element 1: Match the Individual to the Job

17% of the US population, approximately 60 million people, are classified as disabled. Among this population, there is a 60-90% under- and unemployment rate.

A problem of this magnitude will not and has not been solved with charity or government grants. A sustainable solution that can work for 60 million people must simultaneously solve a problem for businesses.

The #1 problem for business is access to a skilled workforce. Skilled workers aren't just able to perform a particular task, like putting two parts together. The term skilled also includes abilities, such as the ability to tolerate high repetition and yet maintain detailed focus. Such abilities are often the critical aspect to success in a job.

These two problems are potential solutions for each other. What is in the way of them being implemented as such?

Words create worlds. Historically, what world has been created, what comes to mind, when we say someone is disabled?
- What are they missing?
- What can't they do?
- What compromises am I going to have to make to employ them?
- What is the cost?
- Is the benefit worth the cost?

An insight we had is that when one ability is diminished, the body makes up for it by causing other abilities to be extraordinary (unique abilities). For example, people with diminished vision often have extraordinary senses of touch and hearing.

What world is created, what comes to mind, when we say someone is uniquely abled?
- What are they really good at?
- How might their unique abilities help me?
- What new things might be accomplished utilizing their unique abilities?

Then the question to ask is, "What job could use this individual's unique abilities?" For example, being a masseuse for someone who has diminished vision and heighted senses of touch and hearing.

So the first element of a successful vocational education program for the uniquely abled includes:
- Shifting the perception of disability to include these unique abilities and extraordinary potential.
- Match the unique abilities of a population of individuals with the needs of a career job.

There is a high unfulfilled demand for skilled workers. For example, current UAAs focus on training individuals with level 1 autism to be CNC (computer numerical controlled) manufacturing machine operators, a well-paid job where there is a very high shortage. The unique abilities of many level 1 autistic individuals are a perfect match for a CNC machinist. These abilities, include, but are not limited to:
- Repetitive tolerant and detail focused.
- Able to focus for long time periods.
- Often high intelligence.
- Often mechanically inclined.
- Focused on accuracy, able to detect when something isn't right.
- Likes working alone.
- Follows rules.
- Does what they say they will do.
- Dislikes transitions to a different company.
- Very appreciative of having a job.

This element could be even better served by the creation of tools for identifying the unique abilities of an individual and tools for identifying a job that matches a given set of abilities.

Element 2: Establish and Manage the Training Program

See:
- Element 2.1 - A Suggested Process for Establishing a Uniquely Abled Academy
- Element 2.2 - A Suggested Process for Establishing a Uniquely Abled Academy at a Company

After selecting a career job in demand and identifying a population whose abilities match the needs of that job, the next steps in establishing a vocational education program for the uniquely abled are to:
- Identify and recruit a Host Institution.
- Validate that there is a sufficient demand for the selected job
- Validate that there is a sufficient supply of the selected population of uniquely abled individuals

For example, a CNC machine operator training program requires expensive equipment and skilled instructors. Thus, a UAA for this job is typically hosted by a community college that is already providing such training. There are numerous benefits to the college for being a Host School:
- New source of students and revenue
- Supports the funding agencies desire that a community college program be vocationally oriented and serve marginalized populations.
- Enhances public image.
- Promotes good relationship with local manufacturers and funding sources.

Once these steps have been accomplished, the next step is to form a UAA Project Team made up of organizations that will partner to produce all 10 elements. We recommend that the UAA Project Team be made up of 10 groups, each focused on delivering one of the 10 elements. In our experience, it typically takes at least 6 months from the first meeting of the UAA Project Team to the first class.

In addition to the ten groups, we have found that it is useful to have someone act as a Program Coordinator. This person serves as the contact for those interested in finding out about the training program; they ensure there is a match of the individual and the program, ensure that all the paperwork is handled, and typically build personal relationships with the trainees so they can handle any issues that might arise (such as a trainee being absent).

Early in the process of establishing a UAA, the Project Team should decide the length of the program. UAAs are typically one college semester, running an average of 13-16 weeks. To get the trainees familiar with working in an industrial environment, the trainees attend full-time, e.g., 9AM – 4PM four or five days a week.

In addition to many relevant documents, the UAP provides a UAA Replication Guide to UAAs that are in formation.

Element 3: Marketing, Recruiting, Selecting, and Onboarding Trainees

It is crucial to establish a process that informs potential trainees about the program, invites them to apply for the program, and ensures that accepted applicants are a good match for the training program as well as the target job.

Element 4: Provide a Vocational Training Curriculum

It is easiest if a vocational education program for the UAA is based on an existing, successful vocational curriculum. However, the timing of the classes is different than the typical college CNC educational program because the UAA is full-time.

Element 5: Provide a Job Readiness Curriculum

Successful soft skills training includes social or psychological topics as well as industrially relevant topics, such as how to receive feedback and what to do if you see a co-worker violating a rule.

The UAP provides the 10-lesson 40-hour *Time to Shine Job Readiness Curriculum* for free to all UAAs training those with level 1 autism to be CNC machine operators.

Element 6: Provide Resources for Instructors

The UAP provides a video and documentation to support CNC instructors teaching autistic populations.

Element 7: Provide Job Development

A successful vocational education program for the uniquely abled must provide support for job search and placement.

Element 8: Support Employment

Coaching needs to be available to employers on how to on-board and manage uniquely abled individuals. Additionally, uniquely abled individuals often need post-hire support (job coach, internship, etc.).

Element 9: Provide External Support Systems

An important component of a successful vocational education program for the uniquely abled are the external support systems, including parents and transportation systems.

Element 10: Provide Funding

To date, all UAAs have been free to students, parents, and employers. Funding has primarily come from government agencies, such as state job development departments.