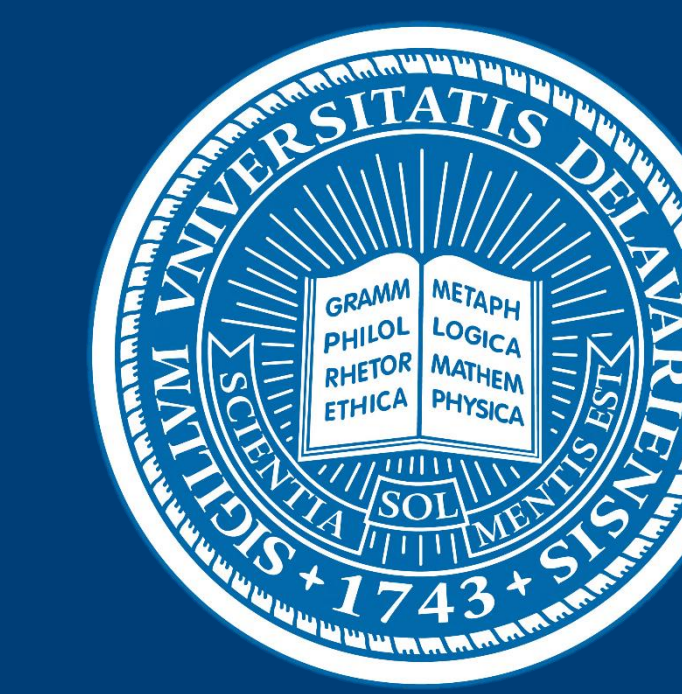




Obtaining and Maintaining Employment for Adults with Complex Communication Needs Who Use Augmentative and Alternative Communication



Haley Olsen

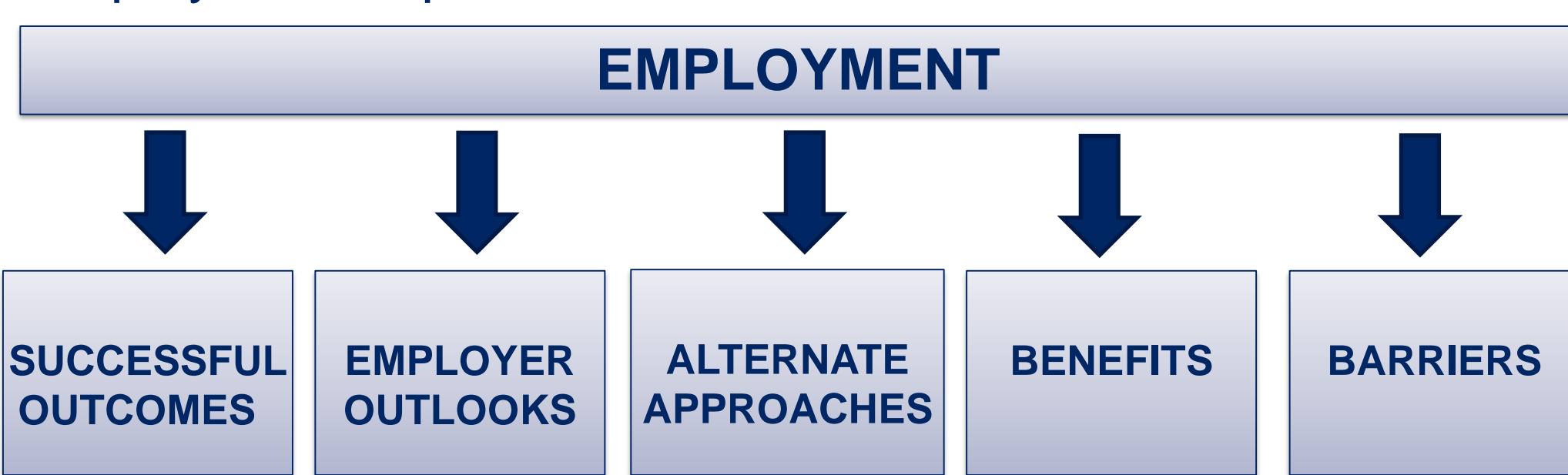
University of Delaware

Introduction

- The population of individuals with complex communication needs (CCN) is a diverse group of individuals
 - developmental disabilities → autism or cerebral palsy
 - acquired disabilities → traumatic brain injuries or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.
- This group of individuals rely on augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) to express their wants and needs, develop social relationships, and exchange information with others in society around them.
- Employment for this population is difficult and despite advancements made in AAC technology over the past several decades, unemployment rates for individuals with CCN who use AAC are extremely high
- Unemployment rates within this population are due to:
 - Employers not seeing the benefit to hiring individuals within this population
 - Lack of proper training by both the employer and the employee
 - Lack of understanding about the additional supports that these individuals require

Purpose & Research Themes

This review of the available literature aims to discuss methods for successful employment outcomes, alternate approaches to traditional community based employment, gather experiences from employers on hiring individuals with CCN who use AAC, and identify employment barriers and benefits to employment for adults with CCN who use AAC in hopes to implement changes that result in positive employment experiences.



Methods

- Comprehensive search of four online databases:
 - PubMed, Scopus, PsychINFO, Web of Science
- Literature inclusion criteria:
 - Individuals with CCN who use AAC
 - Community based employment
 - Quantitative data from interventions
 - Qualitative data gathered from interviews of case studies, focus groups, and surveys
 - Published in English in a peer reviewed journal.
- A total of 32 articles matched these inclusion criteria → after initial screening of studies, 10 articles were selected to be included within.

Results

EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVES

- Several surveys suggest that employers had positive outlooks on hiring individuals who used AAC
- Concerns stated by the surveyed employers included meeting job qualifications, education and skill set, effective communication across settings
- Benefits to working with these individuals: personal satisfaction, workplace moral booster, advocacy and spreading awareness
- Challenges to working with these individuals: reconstructing and developing appropriate jobs, technology knowledge gap, communication barriers meeting demands of the job

IMPROVING OUTCOMES

- Vocational rehab programs focusing on employment skill development → pursuing desired career paths, negotiating, workplace culture, handling finances, transportation, communication within the work place
- Supportive e-coaches that follow individuals throughout beginning of their careers to help work on resumes, develop workplace vocabulary
- Volunteering can also act as a helpful stepping stone to obtaining paid work
- When appropriate measures are made to help with the development of career and employment skills it results with positive employment

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO EMPLOYMENT

SELF EMPLOYMENT

- Financial benefits to supplement government benefits
- Personal benefits include: flexibility of self-employment, being able to enjoy work activities, and choosing their workload
- Successful self-employment outcomes were supported by personal characteristics, education, experiences, and technology

TELEWORK

- Eliminated the time and stress of traveling to and from work
- Adapted and customized work spaces
- Managing and setting up work schedules to work around the disability
- Better management of medical appointments and other necessary activities of daily living
- Control the type of communication to co-workers and employers

BENEFITS

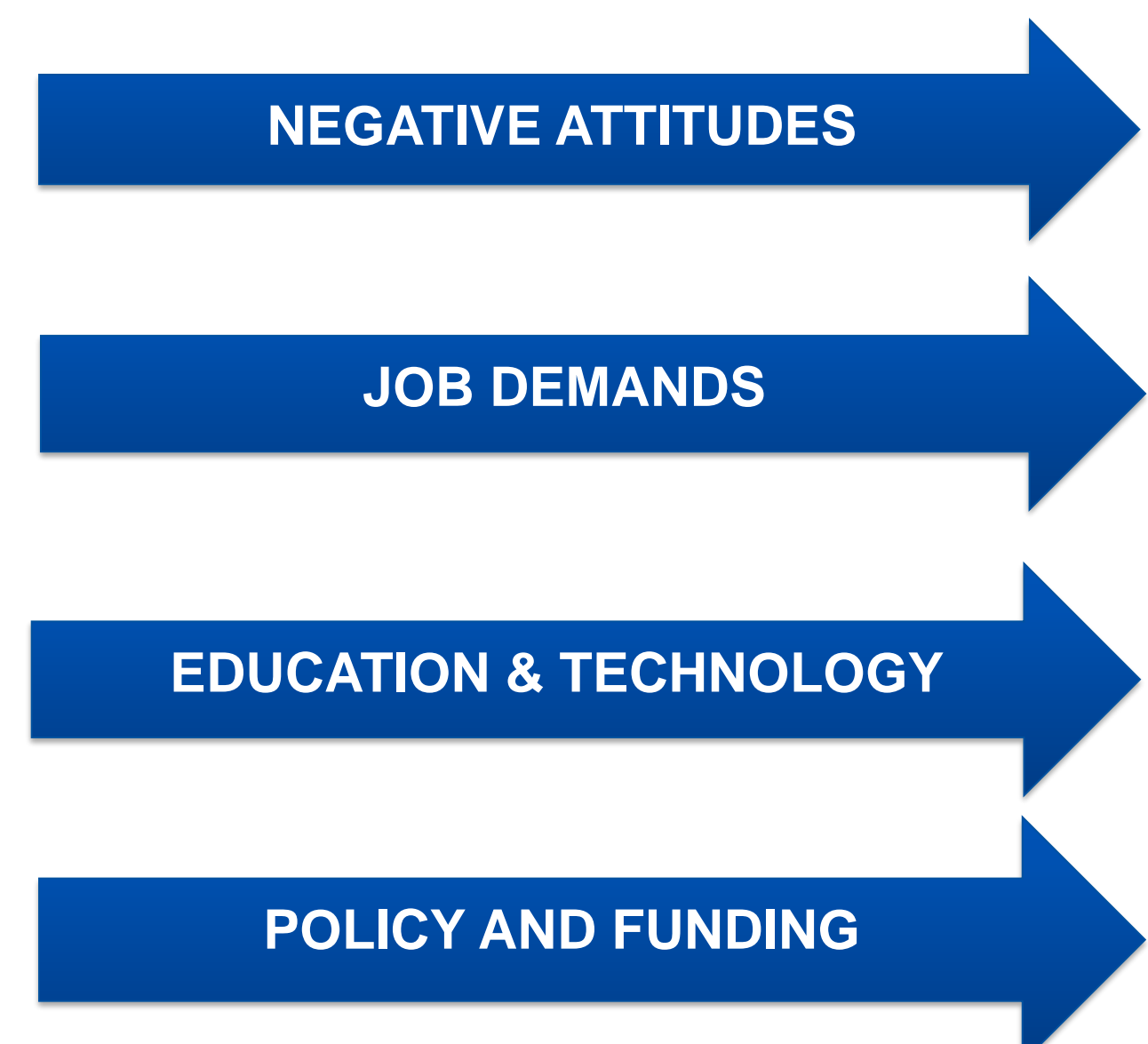


Improve self esteem, give back to society, inspire others, gives a sense of purpose, productivity improves quality of life, identification with occupation

Paying bills or spending money on leisure activities makes these individuals feel worthy which increased self-esteem. Long term financial independence allows them to buy houses, go traveling, plan weddings and have kids

Engagement in workplace activities allowed for continuous social interaction, developing relationships others they may not have met otherwise, and development of a support system

BARRIERS



Outdated ideas of the abilities of people who use AAC, stereotyping, only focusing on this populations' disabilities.

Time constraints caused more difficulty balancing work responsibilities with personal business, limited social interactions, advocating abilities and responsibilities.

Low expectations and assumed incompetence resulting in limited and inappropriate education. AAC limitations impeded abilities to perform, multitask, respond quickly, convey tone, communication breakdowns

Acquiring AAC through the state or insurance is a slow process, AAC devices are expensive and difficult to get full coverage for the device and maintenance.

Conclusion

- These results highlight the challenges that many individuals with CNN who use AAC face when obtaining and maintaining employment.
- A large number of this population continue to be unemployed and struggle to find appropriate and fulfilling employment.
- With appropriate education, experience, and training, appropriate assistive technology, and government policy, obtaining and maintaining employment is possible
- Despite challenges, employment allows these individuals to feel both some measure of financial independence as well as additional pride in their employment activities

Directions for Future Research

- To date there continues to be limited research studies which documents the elements of successful employment for adults with CCN who use AAC.
- It is critical for future research to focus on the following areas



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