

The Six Factors- THE RIGHT JOB WITH THE RIGHT EMPLOYER

Extract from Strategies for Employment Services Specialists Elizabeth Russell, Zeus-Publications 2008

My son Seth was 15 years old when he left school and was successful in obtaining his first job. For several years he got jobs and left them or was dismissed. I needed to know how to help him maintain his employment so I spent some time contacting his old employers and analysing their feedback. I also threw in my own observations along with additional research on FASD. This information presented me with a combination of factors which I believe are essential for a person with FASD to have success maintaining satisfying employment in the long term.

Many people may already know about these factors, after all, FASD is not entirely alone in some of its behaviours and characteristics. It may well be that these factors are familiar to people who work in disability employment.

What I learned was that for an individual with FASD to have a chance at sustainable employment, the following factors must be present:

- The Right Case Manager
- The Right Stage of Social and Emotional Maturity
- The Right living Environment and Social Supports
- The Right Medication and Health Supports
- The Right Employment Program
- The Right job with the Right Employer

The Right Job with the Right Employer

Identifying the 'right job' for any jobseeker regardless of barriers should be based on the interests, experience, transferable skills, ability and capacity of the individual as well as the local labour market.

Hobbies, sports, interests, enjoyable school subjects, courses that might have interested the individual, previous employment, work experience or school projects must all be gathered together, thrashed and analysed so that there are at least two appropriate occupational options.

If there are particular jobs that are of interest to the individual and it is realistic, it would be wise to commence with that one initially. But what if it is unrealistic?

As a case manager years ago, I would suggest to jobseekers, who wanted jobs I believed were inappropriate, that they find and speak with people who were currently working in those jobs. I encouraged the jobseeker to ask the incumbent how the position was obtained.

Was it directly through recruitment? Was a qualification required? Was a licence or certain experience or expertise needed? Was it through a promotion? Did they have to prepare selection criteria?

Even if I knew it was unlikely that the occupation would be available within a reasonable geographical area, or that the particular qualifications required were within the jobseeker's ability, I still felt there was merit in undertaking the research as it allowed the client to own the result.

It wasn't that I wanted the jobseeker to fail in the quest for their dream job – it was more that I wanted the jobseeker to hear the reality of the job from someone else. It also served to show me the commitment of the jobseeker and the willingness to do what was necessary to get this job. I was willing to do whatever it took if I knew the jobseeker was also willing.

For people with FASD, it is important to try and keep challenges to a minimum as the individual will experience these just living from day to day. However, you will not have control over the number or type, as people with FASD will attract them like moths to a flame. While many of us thrive on challenges, for a person with FASD it is best to limit anything that might create disruptions in the routine of his or her life. If the jobseeker needs grounding about the job chosen, it *may* be appropriate to send him or her to obtain this research. Be cautious of over-extending individuals who are more compliant. It is extremely unlikely he or she will return to you with this information and this is something you should expect.

Seth's job at the newsagency was *not* a suitable one for someone who is impulsive, who didn't understand the meaning of 'property' and who was always in need of money.

Had I known then what I know now I wouldn't have put Seth or his employer through this period in their lives – working with money wasn't right for him at that point in time. If a workplace assessment had been prepared for him, a FASD professional would have identified immediately the unsuitability of the inherent duties of the job just as an occupational therapist would find heavy lifting inappropriate for a person with a back problem.

To ensure a better fit, the types of tasks that he or she does well should be an indicator - any sports or hobbies, interests or anything that offers options for the type of work for which you can search.

There needs to be a mixture of repetition and change. Repetition so that the individual can learn the job over a period of time and change so that he or she doesn't get bored with the job, particularly if they have a normal IQ.

It is doubtful although not impossible that a young person with this condition will be able to cope with the demands of a traineeship, an apprenticeship or any other job that requires the completion of external competency-based training as a requirement of the position. However if they have the right support and the job is right for the individual and they have extra time, don't entirely rule it out.

It may also be prudent to consider fewer than full-time hours to avoid overwhelming the individual, as he or she will find it extremely difficult to maintain long hours under pressure. It may be best to start with two or three hours per day, four or five days per week.

The jobseeker is *not* going to change in the short term; they are not *capable* of changing. Yet just as a man with one arm may, in time, develop skills with his remaining hand and arm he could not imagine having when he could use both, it is possible that skills can be learned by people with learning disorders. However, friends, family, teachers and employers need to understand it must be *they* who make the change, whether it is changing perceptions, expectations or the understanding that the behaviour is because of the brain injury and not within the control of the jobseeker.. They will need to have just as much resilience as the jobseeker.

Clients with FASD will have what is called 'on days' and 'off days'. So it is common that they will have days when they can operate fully, remember things and behave at the same level as their chronological age, however their 'off' days will be where everything they try and do turns out wrong or their behaviour is immature. Therefore it is prudent not to be misled by the seeming competency of the client. This is evidenced by the comment below from a caseworker in the United States who works with pre-release prisoners with FASD, it can be very difficult for people not accustomed to this condition to understand

... I have recycled (a client) through one set of skills at least twenty times. He can go from being totally independent in the skill to totally dependent an hour, a day or a week later and we start all over again. When he is at the positive end he does exceptionally well, turns out a good product and gets lots of compliments. This of course builds the self-esteem and he is very proud of his accomplishment. Then he will lose parts of the skill or the sequential thinking part of the task and we have to backtrack. His ability to generalize can be very weak at times. Despite that we have made some incredible progress with him. The problem occurs when the assessor decides to make the assessment on a good day. The assessor then proceeds to report that it has just been proven that he can do it and when he forgets or isn't doing as well then he is obviously being non-compliant and should be 'disciplined'.

If the jobseeker seems keen to work in their own business encourage him back into the normal employer/employee paradigm. Without the structure and routine of a job where someone else sets the ground rules, it is likely that this venture will suffer complications and difficulties almost immediately. In a small business, the individual must respond to jobs without having any external motivators present, such as customers coming through the door or a boss or supervisor as a constant reminder of the next task on the list for the day.

This venture could be compromised by the difficulty the individual might have in planning and organising schedules. Motivation may also be a drawback. In a business such as this, the jobseeker must be self-motivated and must plan dates, times and locations to get the best out of each day. Even though there may be a partner, family or friends assisting, it could be more than the individual can sustain in the long term.

Once the initial novelty of having a business wears off and the day-to-day tedium of getting out of bed without having a pre-set starting time, with no one who can manage, remind, supervise, explain or decide for the individual, the problems begin. It is difficult enough to plan and organise a day *off* so it will be almost impossible to be the sole organiser of a business that makes a regular living. This will be true of any small business enterprise.

The individual with FASD can only take so much in at a time and once they become overwhelmed with information, noise or activity they can often either shutdown or become agitated to the point of aggression or belligerence.

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An ideal situation is a job where there are regular hours and where the employer commences the new employee on basic tasks. By gradually increasing the level of responsibility, the employee can build up his or her skills gradually and have time to consolidate each new task.

An employer model that includes the provider, employer and possibly the client, can provide cohesion between the parties so that many of the difficulties likely to be experienced by the client can be potentially overcome through the foundational work put into developing the stakeholder relationships in the early stages of the job search.

Bringing the client in as a stakeholder is ideal in a perfect world, however for the most part a person with FASD will remain connected to most discussions for no longer than five minutes and then it may become very obvious that the client would prefer to be anywhere than in a discussion about his or her future employment.