

## QUATSEE COURSE OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

### LESSON 3

#### *DEFINITION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT.*

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

At the end of this lesson, you should:

- Have a clear idea of this concept
- Be able to define “supported employment”
- Be able to define “labour integration”
- Know what are its most essential characteristics
- Know to differentiate it from other systems to access to employment

We could go on presenting the particular experience of many people of our environment, for whom the supported employment has given them a unique opportunity to take an advantage. We will have time to continue monitoring the impact this work integration system has on the lives of many people with diverse abilities. They have been brave and have dared to undertake a difficult march and fraught with difficulties, attracted by the challenge presented to them before it be able to demonstrate their abilities and willingness to contribute. Nothing will be the same, once we enter on the path leading to the summit. It will change even to the personal status of citizens. But, now, before going on, it's time to dwell on the concepts, to clear confusions and to continue our upward path

### 3. 1. DEFINITION OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT.

Supported employment has evolved incorporating advances and improvements in the last two decades of the twentieth century, but its definition as a concept has remained unchanged over time. The first and best definition appears in U.S. law, collecting the key components of the concept. It says:

#### *Definition*

*"Supported employment is competitive work in integrated work environments for people with severe disabilities, for those who traditionally have not gained access never to competitive employment, or for whom such employment has been interrupted or intermittent as a result of a severe disability, and for those who need ongoing support services to perform the job because of his/her disability. "(The Rehabilitation Act Amendments, 1986, USA).*

#### *Key features*

Another essential and shorter definition provided by EUSE (European Union of Supported Employment) in 2005 states-

*"To give support to people with a disability or from a disadvantaged situation to gain and maintain employment in the open labour market."*

#### *Open labour market*

These definitions include the key features that characterize the supported employment, which are:

*Open labour market means competitive employment in integrated work environments where the general population work and where people will have a useful and effective contribution, paid work, and where the conditions are set by an*

individualized labour contract;

*People with a disability and from a disadvantaged situation*

*For people with severe disabilities or from a disadvantaged situation:* nowadays we do not say any more the word “severe”, we here identify them as people with diverse abilities, because it is aimed to people who can, but they find some physical, mental or social limitations or barriers in the environment, and this needs to be modified and people need support to succeed in their adaptation or performance of their tasks;

*Support services*

*Ongoing support services-* is another key aspect, people require support, training and monitoring, to succeed in their labour careers, and the system guarantees them these services adapted to their changing needs. These supports can be professional or natural.

*Supported employment is thus actual employment in companies or entities in the community, with supports tailored to the needs, for people with diverse abilities.*

*Reflection of a fair society*

Although this system has been traditionally applied only to people with disabilities of a physical, mental or sensory impairment, in recent years it is also being applied to other groups of people with difficulties or social disadvantages.

Finally, we can say that this system makes real the right to equal opportunities and it reflects a fair society that embraces diversity and promotes social inclusion of citizens who suffer some disadvantages.

### 3. 1. 1. DEFINITION OF "LABOUR INTEGRATION".

The term *labour integration* is very much used, especially by entities of the disability sector and public entities, but too often concepts are confused, hence the need to stop for a moment in its definition.

Labour integration is:

#### *Definition*

*"The addition of a person with support needs to a real job of an ordinary company, where the supported worker works with/and interacts frequently with other workers of the general population. The employee has signed an individualized employment contract and receives a fair wage by category for the work done."*

#### *Comparison to school integration*

In the same way that the term "school integration" does not give rise to misunderstandings, and everyone identifies it with integration into mainstream school and it is not a special school, "labour integration" should also be seen as integration into an ordinary company and not in a sheltered company or special employment center.

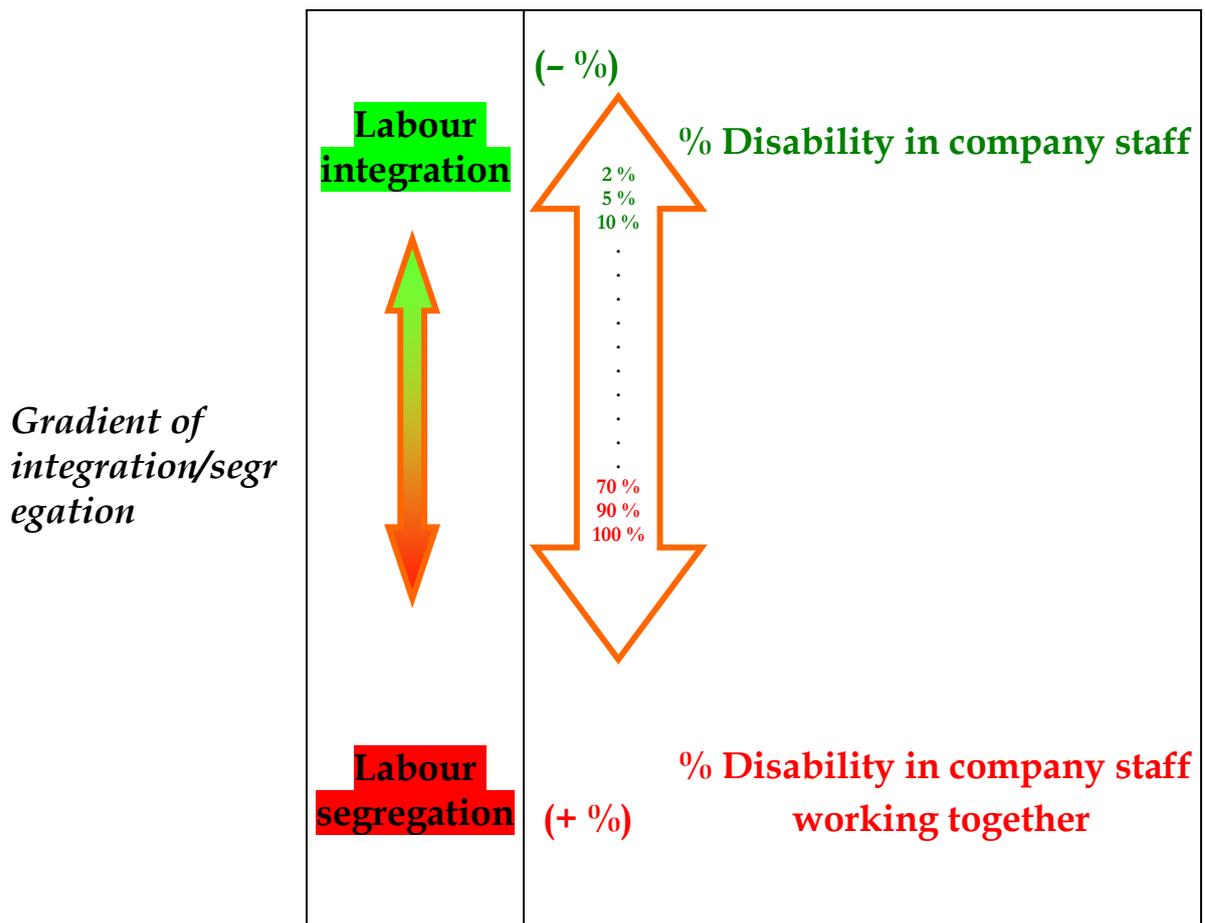
One has to be objective and consistent with the terms used: if a policy of educational segregation was practiced, for example, schooling children with certified disabilities in special education schools, we would not call it "school integration". Therefore, in the same way, in labour field, if a policy of grouping people with disability certificate in specific workplaces was practiced, it would be misleading and wrong to call this policy "labour integration."

#### *Respect the natural proportion that exists in society*

Supported employment seeks labour integration precisely through individual placement in environments that favor the interaction with people from the general population not classified and where

the principle of natural proportions is respected. Therefore, if in Europe around 10% of the population has a disability, according to the European Commission, this should be the maximum amount of people with a disability certificate in the staff of a conventional company. The higher is the percentage, the more we distance from what is "labour integration."

A continuum or gradient of labour integration/segregation could be established in the following terms:



### 3. 2. CHARACTERISTICS OF S.E.

It is important to deepen in the understanding of the main features of this system of labour integration. It can be summarised as follows:

*Integrated employment*

1. Real job, integrated into the regular labour market: that is, there is an individualized labour contract in a conventional company of the open market, and the target people are included with the general population, with opportunity for interaction with peers without certification of disability.

*First, placement, then, training*

2. Training on the job: the concept of "advance preparation" is in danger, the system instructs in the workplace, thus avoiding the problem of learning transferring.

*One person, one job*

3. Individualized support: all processes are customized, individual placement is sought (one person/one job), training and monitoring one by one.

*Job coach*

4. The Job Coach: is the professional responsible for providing the supports (natural and professional) the person needs to be successful in his/her work life and get a quality social inclusion. The job coach often acts in defense of workers he/she supports, and he or she is gradually disappearing, as the worker is self-sufficient.

*Ongoing support*

5. Ongoing support services: supports will vary in duration, depending on the needs of each person, but always must guarantee the success of the worker in his/her working life.

## SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT: AN INNOVATIVE LINE TO SERVE PEOPLE

*Launch into the  
sand*

Since in the 80s the system of Supported Employment appeared, there are many advances that have occurred in the concept and the image of the capabilities of these groups of people, opening the door to a new horizon of hope. During the past 35 years, many published studies evaluate the potential of people with physical, mental or sensory impairment, and his/her ability to integrate into the same companies employing citizens of the community and to make productive functions as others (Wehman and Kregel, 1992; Stiles, 1999; Wehman, 2001).

*Effective  
methodology*

Supported Employment is presented, therefore, as a practical, serious and structured system (Inge et al., 1991), which makes it possible for these people to integrate in the ordinary companies, and move from being passive citizens or pensioners at 20 years old, to become active citizens who contribute and participate in the construction of society.

*Fast propagation  
all over the world*

Supported Employment has expanded successfully in the U.S., Canada, Australia, Japan, etc., though not with the force that initially was promised. In Europe we are developing it, for over 30 years. In the European context, Ireland, United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Spain and Portugal have been pioneers in experimenting with this system and has contributed and continues to contribute to the momentum of this movement across the continent (IMSERSO, 1999).

*Avail researcher  
from universities*

We started, years ago, the implementation of Supported Employment in our daily practice, and we could neither divert nor discourage the chosen way, in view of personal progress achieved by workers with disabilities in all areas,

*A future solution* but mainly in their self-esteem and their inclusion and participation in the community.

Many universities in the world have provided evidence and continue to investigate the improvement of procedures involved in Supported Employment; many of them have postgraduate courses, master's degrees, or specific open university courses, to train specialists in supporting labour integration. In all the sites where this system of labour inclusion has been implemented, the greatest concern now is how to improve the quality of services given.

Supported Employment is therefore a living movement, innovative, which reaches deep into workers who try, in their parents, professionals in the business and society in general. It therefore represents a promising solution for any developed country.

*The concept* But one must be careful, when talking about Supported Employment. Some speak of this system without having never practised it, without being documented, and without knowing exactly what it is. There are prejudices that, unfortunately, sometimes paralyse the development of new policies.

### **THE CONCEPT OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT**

#### **Supported employment IS NOT:**

- 1\* A placement agency dedicated to provide matchmaking services to find a job in the open market to people with disabilities, and once these people are placed, they hardly need support, and only need a

monitoring by phone for the success in his/her placement.

- 2\* A job in an ordinary company with a monitor always next to the person. Those who are minimally familiar with this system know that the job coach controls the support of 6 or 8 workers, on average, and he or she will be able to control more or less people, depending on the support services that the workers he or she accompanies need.
- 3\* Support in Occupational Centres or in Sheltered Workshops. When one acts in centres monitoring to a group of employees grouped by their disability, as a common characteristic, it is not Supported Employment.
- 4\* Selection of the “best” candidates and rejection of those who have great needs. There is the mistaken belief that Supported Employment is valid only for those who need less support. This is not the spirit of this line of intervention which was precisely created to provide employment opportunities to people who were considered 'unfit' to work in the 'special productive workshops.’’
- 5\* Training courses or work experience in companies: Supported Employment is not "preparing for..." nor a period of practical learning, associated generally to a training course in which there is not a labour contract nor a salary.

All this might seem convenient, sometimes,

or might involve a change from what was being done before, and even it might mean a commendable effort for organizations, but it is not supported employment.

### **Supported employment IS:**

**Paid work in ordinary businesses** of the community with individual labour contract, for those people with disabilities or other groups who need support and monitoring. It could also be 'supported self-employment

An **individualized support system** that provides opportunities for people who have significant disabilities or from a disadvantaged situation to facilitate their inclusion in the regular labour market as full citizens. Quality Supported Employment always begins from individual interests and acts through a person-centred planning.

A **philosophical concept** that, when applying it in practice, makes possible equal opportunities in society for those citizens who are most in need of support.

Promotion and "**empowerment**" of participants. Supported Employment seeks the placement of people with significant disabilities in mainstream companies, and their professional and personal promotion in the community, so participants increasingly are more involved in making decisions that affect their lives, have access to all the information they need for self-determination and self-protection, control the money the state allocates for their personal support and to advance in their 'professional career'.

**Social inclusion with natural supports.** Supported Employment always pursues quality

social inclusion in community environments where the individual is integrated, therefore, labour inclusion specialists know it is very important to encourage natural supports within and outside the company, so they gradually are able to disappear with the success of the inclusion process.

**An active employment policy** that is able to incorporate efficiently regular employment to people with significant disabilities. Active policy to combat unemployment of this group, not making the State or the entities to pay large investments. It is only necessary to invest in the necessary technical support for instruction and monitoring of these workers, and also in some of the recruitment incentive policies.

**Conversion of services.** The concept of Supported Employment is a revolution in the approach of our facilities and services. From centre-based programmes, one must move to provide real-inclusion programmes based on the community. Supported Employment can be a useful system to help in the difficult process of retraining centres.

As Dale Di Leo (1995) says, *"Supported employment is not an option in the range of services, is a whole new way of thinking about services."*

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### 3.3. COMPARISON OF SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT TO OTHER SYSTEMS TO ACCESS TO EMPLOYMENT

For some time, people with intellectual disabilities have demonstrated amply that may be useful to society occupying special positions in productive enterprises. But with supported employment they have also demonstrated for 35 years, that they may be useful occupying productive positions in conventional businesses of the open market. The same thing has been demonstrated by other groups of people with diverse abilities.

We have to compare these two systems according to the most highlighted aspects.

*Confidence vs  
mistrust*

Supported employment comes from the confidence in the abilities of people (it is very difficult to find a person who cannot contribute absolutely anything to society ...) and trust in the business (these are increasingly looking for implementing shared social responsibility). The sheltered workshop, company or centre, comes out from the pessimism about the employability of the group in the open labour market.

*Invest in support or  
invest in business*

Supported employment invests in the supports each person needs in the business community. The special company invests in the business of a community, to be profitable, and where has to produce a certain group of people.

*More or less social  
integration*

Supported employment is integrated employment in companies where the general population works, therefore it offers more opportunities for social integration. Company or

*Fair salary,  
according to  
productivity, vs  
subsidy salary*

special environment provides opportunities especially interacting with peers with disabilities.

*Economic  
differences*

Supported employment, although it may take associated economic incentives for entrepreneurs, offers a salary without subsidies, by category and covenant. The sheltered company always receives fiscal benefits or incentives from the state, for instance in Spain, they receive among others a monthly subsidy of 50% of the minimum wage for each worker with a disability, regardless his/her productivity.

*Strategic  
differences*

Supported employment is more economical as a social service, because it is performed immersed in industries and market businesses already created, and it just assumes the payment of the support staff. The sheltered company or institution is as a social service much more costly for the state, because generally it has to contribute from the site to the company building, machinery, facilities, equipment depreciation and staff.

In the special centre, the strategic objective is this centre: the investment to be profitable, the production to be increasing, costs to be controlled, in order to provide a good balance of performance and ensure business continuity. In Supported employment the project is the person.

## SUMMARISING

### What is Supported Employment?

It is a new system of technical and individualized support that helps people with significant disabilities and other groups to find and maintain an employment in the open labour market. Around the supported employment there are a lot of people with stories possibly far away from labour inclusion, whose lives have changed course bravely, parents and relatives who overcome their initial fears, innovative professionals convinced of their mission and excited about the results they get, and modern entrepreneurs and pioneers who decide to be something more than what they were being so far.

Supported employment is a dynamic movement that believes in people and improves society as a whole. It has 40 years of development, since it was launched in Canada and the U.S.A., in the late 70s, having spread later to other continents and developed countries. The guarantee and verification of experimental results available to the system today makes no one considers this formula of work integration as an utopia, but rather the opposite: Supported employment is a system that has already proven its effectiveness in multiple ways and, therefore, it deserves to be taken into account by governments and public authorities of any country.

In Europe the movement came through Ireland, by 1987, spreading rapidly among the countries of the old continent, defenders of human rights. Spain, Portugal, U.K. and The Netherlands quickly joined since 1988, and they have developed many demonstrative projects with many different target groups, initiatives that are still alive today, in all European countries, supporting several thousands of workers with disabilities and without who have nowadays an integrated employment.

Supported employment provides the necessary means to serve people, so they can contribute to the construction of society, like the other citizens, in business of the community. Therefore, from this perspective, no one shall be denied the opportunity to find a job in the regular labour system because of a disability or other circumstances.

And this is what the supported employment does. It represents, therefore, a certain hope for thousands of people with diverse abilities, who are able and want to contribute as active citizens.

### **Supported employment: a different way of thinking about people.**

This system of labour inclusion is intended to varied groups of people with different skills and they may perform many tasks in jobs in the labour market. They are candidates to be evaluated very carefully in terms of their capabilities and skills and to be guided in the direction marked by their preferences and aspirations. Supported employment also values support needs that people have to perform the functions of their job, in order to successfully perform a lace suitable labour.

It does not matter to have blindness or cerebral palsy, profound deafness or mental illness, Down syndrome or spinal befit, we value people for their qualities and potentialities and to find the position that best suits them. We never value people to label them and exclude them from employment. Labels are only placed in cans.

Supported employment promoters say: it is not fair to get appropriated of these people's lives, simply because they have a disability and support needs. They add: it is not fair to make important decisions on their behalf, without consultation or respect them. I told this to my friend Isabel -the first case with which we began this course. Her answer:

*Isn't it important to be able to decide if I want to be an active or passive citizen at my age (26)?*

*Isn't it important to be able to go and work in any company in my city, where my neighbors go?*

For supported employment it is, so it is a system that wants to help everybody who is able to get what they want.

## **Take time to your real person of reference**

If supported employment is something that has to do with people, it is essential that in these early weeks of the course, you spend as much time as possible to get to know the reference person you have chosen to accompany on his/her road to labour inclusion. Do not spend too many hours at the computer and go and spend time with this person as long as possible, to know his/her way of life, how he/she thinks, how he/she reacts, what excites him/her, what his/her hobbies are, which job he/she could have, etc. This requires the fact that you listen a lot, be a good observer, and get a good rapport with him/her.

In lesson 5, when we see the candidate assessment process, we will insist on this fundamental aspect of knowledge of the person, but now, for you to go ahead, you should start the process, accumulating knowledge of your participant. So you should take your notebook and plan some trips together.

Good job!