

## It's Not Working

Work provides a source of income, an opportunity to meet and know other people, a sense of accomplishment and self-esteem, a means to learn and develop new interests or skills, and an avenue to realize other priorities in life. Finding and choosing a job or career are important life decisions.

According to the National Council on Disability's report *Empowerment for Americans with Disabilities: Breaking Barriers to Careers and Full Employment*. (October 2007):

- Almost 22 million Americans of working age have a disability (representing one-eighth of all working-age Americans)
- These individuals are half as likely as Americans without disabilities to be employed
  - ~ 38% of people with disabilities are employed
  - ~ 78% of people without disabilities are employed
- Employment is even lower for those individuals with more severe disabilities (17%)

The limits and barriers faced by people with disabilities in choosing and obtaining work contribute to their diminished social roles, lack of respect, poverty, and isolation.

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*Do people with intellectual disabilities have options for where they work?*

*How do work options impact the quality of life for people?*

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The Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL) reports the latest findings from the National Personal Outcome Measures® database. Based on over 6,400 interviews with people with disabilities, we confirm that we have much left to do as field to ensure that people are choosing where they work.

## It's Not Working

The importance of work in our lives is clear. Work impacts our economic, social, and psychological well-being. Economic resources increase our physical comfort and opportunity. Employment often leads to greater social interaction and connections. Meaningful work provides a sense of accomplishment and enhanced self-esteem. “A lack of employment opportunities limits the ability of many people with disabilities to fully participate in society.” (National Council on Disability, 2007)

With access to supports and technology, most people with disabilities can enter the job market. When people have supports, assistive technology, and environmental adaptations, work options are enhanced. Organizations assist people to make work-related decisions by finding out what they would like, providing opportunities to see what is available, and honoring their choices. People want employment that matches their goals, interests, skills, and aptitudes.

Our practice tells us that choice is strengthened when:

- Organizations learn about each person's preferences for work, the type of job, the hours, the location, and the responsibilities.
- People learn what is available and are able to experience a range of work options.
- People's preferences, interests, and desires are at the center of job and career selection.
- Assistive technology is available to enhance people's employment potential and productivity.
- Over time, organizations support people to change jobs when they discover that the job may not be all they thought they wanted.

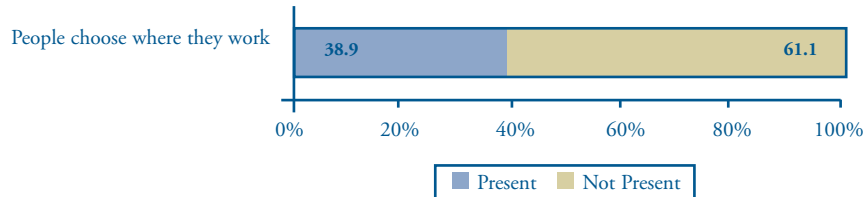
Our data, however, indicate that less than 4 in 10 people chose where they work.

In CQL Accredited organizations, offering work options and individual choice are ongoing challenges. Building on their core values of person-directed supports, organizations need to continue in their role as bridging organizations in the community. Through partnerships with community members and employers, organizations can come together to improve the overall work climate in the community. CQL's Community Life® measures offer strategies for analyzing community data, matching people's needs and priorities with those of the community, and finding potential partners for action. Many communities as a whole are faced with a host of employment concerns – lack of jobs, lack of skilled or reliable workers, how to attract new businesses, how to re-vitalize older neighborhoods, how to link transportation with jobs, affordable housing for workers, and so on.

By working together to advocate for a better community for all, people with disabilities will both contribute to and benefit from the changes we all want.

## Employment Outcome 1993-2006

(n=6,424)



Further analysis reveals the following:

### Living situations and choosing work:

- People living in Supervised (24-hour) settings report fewer outcomes in the area of choosing work than people in other settings
- People living Independently or in supported settings are more likely to choose where they work

### Source of funding and choosing work:

- People whose services are funded through the ICF/MR program had significantly fewer choices for work as compared with other funding sources (such as Home and Community Based Services-HCBS)

These findings hold true regardless of the level or type of disability experienced by the person.

Our data further support the findings of many social scientists on the far-reaching benefits of employment. For individuals with intellectual disabilities in the CQL database, the presence of the *Choosing Work* outcome indicates that the following other outcomes are also more likely to be present:

- People live in integrated environments
- People choose personal goals
- People perform different social roles
- People choose where and with whom they live
- People interact with other members of the community
- People exercise rights

### Percent of Outcomes Present

(1993 – 2006)

	National Data	Living Situation				Funding Source		
		Supervised (24-hour)	Supported	Family	Independent	ICF	HCBS	Other
People choose where they work	38.9%	28.9%	53%	45.4%	62.2%	26.0%	37.9%	47.8%

*Inspired by a vision of a world of dignity, opportunity, and community inclusion for all people,*

The Council on Quality and Leadership (CQL) is an international leader in the definition, measurement, and improvement of quality of life for people with disabilities. CQL has demonstrated that valid and reliable quality of life measurement can be incorporated in community-based human services.

In the 1990s, CQL changed human services when it redefined quality as responsiveness to people rather than compliance with standards. After conducting focus groups throughout North America, CQL published the *Personal Outcome Measures*® offering people with disabilities an opportunity to define their own quality of life outcomes and exert choice and self-determination. In 1993, CQL published the *Personal Outcome Measures*® as an alternative to both its traditional quality indicators and assessment methodology. CQL signaled a new era in quality measurement with a re-definition of quality from organizational compliance to responsiveness to people. The Personal Outcomes focus on the items and issues that matter most to people. Organizations committed to Personal Outcomes recognize the connections between the service and intervention and the whole person. Learning about Personal Outcomes results from talking to people and discovering what is important to them and why.

In 2005, CQL introduced the *Quality Measures 2005*®, including the 2005 edition of *Personal Outcome Measures*®. This new edition contains 21 Personal Outcomes, organized into the following factors:

- My Self:** Who I am as a result of my unique heredity, life experiences and decisions.
- My World:** Where I work, live, socialize, belong or connect.
- My Dreams:** How I want my life (self and world) to be.

CQL recognizes that large-scale adaptation of a person-centered approach to Basic Assurances® and quality of life assessment is strengthened by an evidence-based quality model. To that end, we established the *Personal Outcome Measures*® Database in 1993. The database now contains data collected during interviews with over 6,400 individuals receiving services from CQL Accredited organizations, between 1993 and 2006. These organizations are not a random sample of the disability service system. They are instead a group of highly motivated service/support providers who have adopted the principles and practices of the *Personal Outcome Measures*®. They represent a range of community service providers delivering residential, vocational, service coordination, case management and other supports, and are found across the United States in small rural communities, as well as suburban and metropolitan areas.

During the CQL Accreditation process, individuals with disabilities meet a CQL staff member for a personal outcomes interview and follow-up is done with others who know the person best to further evaluate the presence of outcomes and supports for each person. People in the CQL database represent the range of intellectual and developmental disabilities, as well as mental illnesses.

CQL has studied and published findings from the data in peer-reviewed journals (see references below). We have demonstrated and reported on the validity of the *Personal Outcome Measures*® as an instrument and the reliability of the review and interview methodology.

This is one of a series that reports key findings from the CQL National *Personal Outcome Measures*® Database. We encourage readers to consider the lessons learned from our data in the movement toward a meaningful quality of life for people with disabilities.



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