Building Employers' Capacity to Support Vocational Opportunities for Adults With Developmental Disabilities: A Synthesis Review of Grey Literature

Abstract

Although a significant body of literature has focused on employment supports, knowledge of beneficial components of vocational services for adults with developmental disability (DD) from the perspective of employers is lacking. To our knowledge there is no synthesis review of grey literature focused on services, supports and strategies that foster employers' capacity to support employment for adults with DD, including autism spectrum disorder (ASD). This review builds on our review of peer-reviewed literature in this area, and may reveal information and ideas not reported in academic materials. Accommodation in the workplace was a main theme that emerged in numerous documents included in this review. In addition, employment support and job coaching was identified as vital to supporting employment for people with ASD and DD. Education, awareness training and recruitment also emerged as main themes in the documents. The evidence from this synthesis review provides a strong platform to understand the literature focused on services, supports and strategies that foster employers' capacity to support employment for adults with ASD and DD, including information broadly available outside of academic contexts.

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Research has emphasized several approaches to improving opportunities for valued and meaningful work for individuals with developmental disability (DD). Approaches consisted of partnerships between employers and employment service providers, and networking opportunities between employers (Crawford, 2012; Human Resources Development Canada, 2002). In a study done in the United States (U.S.), effective practices to promote integrated employment included building collaborations and partnerships between employers and DD agencies capacity through information sharing, open communication, ongoing training, and technical assistance (Timmons, Bose, & Hall, 2013). A recent U.S. review of practices at vocational rehabilitation agencies identified promising practices for vocational rehabilitation, including using a standardized process to refer individuals with DD to vocational rehabilitation, state legislature to increase funding for long-term supported employment and decrease wait lists, and inter-agency collaboration (Burns, Haines, Porter, Boeltzig-Brown, & Foley, 2013).

Job consultants who serve individuals with DD employ a greater percentage of strategies in areas related to career

planning and assessment, and facilitating transition after hire as compared to job search strategies (Migloire, Butterworth, Nord, Cox, & Gelb, 2012). Recently, the Canadian Association for Supported Employment (2014) and its partners identified nine best practices for employing people with DD, including: choice and control, paid employment, partnership, full inclusion, job search, individualized, natural supports, long term support, and continuous quality improvement.

Although a significant body of literature has focused on employment supports, knowledge of beneficial components of vocational services for adults with DD from the perspective of employers is lacking (Nicholas & Roberts, 2012; Richards, 2012; Van Wieren, Reid, & McMahon, 2008. It is important to consider the perspective of employers, who have the ultimate control over hiring individuals with DD. We recently completed a knowledge synthesis of peer-reviewed literature in this area (Rashid, Hodgetts, & Nicholas, 2017), which revealed that relatively limited research has focused on employer perspectives. A significant amount of information is now available online. As such, for this review we have specifically focused on exploring grey literature, which may expose us to a wide range of information and new ideas that may not be reported in published materials (Simkhada, Knight, Reid, Wyness & Mandava, 2004). Grey literature is mainly comprised of unpublished documents, such as conference proceedings, dissertations, bibliographies, and government reports/documents (Alberani, Pietrangeli, & Mazza, 1990).

Methods

Search Strategies

A Google Scholar search was conducted with the assistance of a research librarian to identify documents focused on services, supports and strategies to help build employers' capacity to support vocational opportunities for adults with DD and/or autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Based on the literature we found in our synthesis review of peer-reviewed research, we also specified epilepsy in our search strategy. The search strategy was restricted to English language, grey literature and pdf files. As

recommended by the research librarian, we initially reviewed the first 50 documents within each search to maintain consistency across our Google searches. If new information continued to emerge as we reviewed these 50 documents, we planned to review more documents until no new information emerged. However, a review of results past the first 50 within each search was not required because no new information was emerging.

Inclusion/Exclusion of Studies

This review focused on services, supports and strategies to help build employers' capacity to support vocational opportunities for adults with DD, ASD and epilepsy (hereafter referred to collectively as DD, unless findings were specific to a diagnostic group). We included all documents that met the following inclusion criteria: (1) focused on supporting individuals with DD, (2) considered employers and/or colleagues' perspectives, (3) written in English, and (4) consisted of grey literature, including personal websites and blogs. One reviewer screened the documents retrieved from the search. The full texts of all the relevant documents were retrieved for review. Documents were grouped into three categories: include, exclude, or unsure. Both reviewers (MR & SH) met to review the full texts for the "unsure articles" with a final decision to either include or exclude each article.

Data Extraction and Analysis

A standardized data extraction form was used to extract data from all included documents. The main components of the form were study publication information (e.g., year of publication, country) and findings. One reviewer (MR) extracted data and a second reviewer (SH) checked the entries to make sure that the content extracted was accurate. Extraction discrepancies were resolved by consensus. Descriptive study information and detailed findings from each document are presented in Table 1. A thematic analysis was conducted, which revealed four emergent themes from the documents. These are summarized below.

Results

Description of Included Studies

The electronic Google search yielded 150 potentially relevant documents for screening. After title and abstract review (when present), all 150 documents were selected for full review with 19 documents meeting the inclusion criteria after full-text review. General study characteristics are presented in Table 1. The majority of documents (n = 9) were produced in the United States, five documents were produced in Canada, three documents were produced in the United Kingdom (UK), and two documents contained information related to the European Union. Although not necessarily evident based on document titles in Table 1, the review revealed that employee diagnosis varied across the included documents, with 12 documents focusing on unclassified disabilities, six documents focusing on ASD, and one document focusing on epilepsy.

Table 1. Findings From the 19 Grey Area Resources Included in the Study

Authors (Year); Location	Owens (2010); USA
Source	HR Magazine
Title	Hiring employees with autism: as more people with autism enter the workforce, employers are tapping a new source of talent
Salient Findings	The document focuses on discussing Ken's Kids, Inc. (now Ken's Krew) in Home Depot stores.
	What is needed for employment programs to be successful:
	(1) support from store management and store associates; (2) consistent support from job coaches; (3) sensitivity training for store managers.
	The Home Depot's district managers conduct orientation and training so store managers can uphold company policies and explain procedures to new associates.
	Ken's Kids job coaches are paid by the program. After 3 months, the amount of coaching starts to gradually decrease, but coaches continue to conduct spot checks on workers every 2 to 6 weeks, depending on the individual.
Authors (Year); Location	Kurtz & Jordan (2008); Canada
Source	Institute for Community Inclusion
Title	Supporting individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders: Quality employment practices.
Salient Findings	Employment specialists assist employers with job training, fine-tuning job supports and accommodations, and answering questions that arise from supervisors or coworkers. They can also serve as a liaison between work and home to maximize communication between the employee and employer.
	Employment staff can help employers provide customized supports for workers who might need extra attention around predictability and routine. Some effective strategies and resources include a visual schedule, the use of personal digital assistants, reviewing a schedule with the employee regularly, discussing changes in routine or personnel in advance, and extra support during periods of transition or personnel changes.

Table 1. Findings From the 19 Grey Area Resources Included in the Study (continued)

Authors (Year); Location	Iyer & Masling (2015); USA
Source	Curb cuts to the middle class initiative
Title	Recruiting, hiring, retaining, and promoting people with disabilities
Salient Findings	This resource guide includes a list of federal agencies working together to ensure employers have the tools and resources they need to recruit, hire, retain, and promote people with disabilities.
	The following strategies and resources were listed to assist employers in the process of hiring and retaining employees with disabilities: local American job centres, forming community partnerships, disability awareness training, workplace mentoring programs, employee resource groups, job coaches, and employee onboarding programs.
Authors (Year); Location	North East Community Partners for Inclusion (2005); Canada
Source	*
Title	Guide to hiring persons with disabilities for Saskatchewan employers
Salient Findings	This document provided strategies and resources for hiring persons with disabilities. Co-worker education, supported employment agencies, job coaching, disability awareness training for staff, on-the-job training, and job carving were listed as employment supports and strategies for employers.
	The guide suggested co-worker education should comprise disability sensitivity training and information on how to support co-workers with disabilities.
	Provincial supportive employment agencies in Saskatchewan offer funding for employment supports, including job coaches, while federal programs offer funding to cover costs such as wages and other related employer expenses.
Authors (Year); Location	Martin et al. (2014); USA
Source	Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp)
Title	Employing people with intellectual and developmental disabilities
Salient Findings	Introductory work programs, which are designed to introduce workers with intellectual and developmental disabilities to the workplace, were positively reviewed by the majority of surveyed respondents. These programs provide organizations with on-location work trials, job shadowing, internships, and/or long-term work exchanges.
	Employment support agencies can provide a range of services to assist employers, including transportation, on-the-job support, pre-employment training, job carving, and information on workplace accommodations.

* Same as author

Table 1. Findings From the 19 Grey Area Resources Included in the Study (continued)

Authors (Year); Location	Fredeen et al. (2012); Canada
Source	Labour market opportunities for persons with disabilities
Title	Rethinking disability in the private sector
Salient Findings	This document discussed employment support strategies for private organizations.
	Disability awareness training for staff and collaboration with community partners were determined to be valuable strategies for employers looking to support staff members with disabilities.
	Community partners can assist employers with post-placement support where support can be for the employer, the employee, or both. The duration of their services varies, depending on the needs of the employer and employee.
	Once a candidate is hired, community partners can also assist with onboarding and training activities. These services include job coaching, advice concerning accommodations and information on programs and resources useful for both employer and the employee.
Authors (Year); Location	Dunst et al. (2015); USA
Source	Kansas University Center on Developmental Disabilities and the Beach Center on Disability
Title	What every employer needs to know: Key success factors for hiring people with disabilities.
Salient Findings	This document discusses the importance of collaboration between employers/HR staff and employees during the workplace accommodation process.
	This document also highlights an employment support outcome measure entitled the Self-Determined Career Development Model (SDCDM). The SDCDM is specifically designed for use by adolescents and adults with disabilities, to support job and career-related goal setting and attainment and promote more positive employment and career development outcomes. A facilitator is integral to model implementation. It is critical for people with disabilities to be able to communicate about their needed accommodations, but also to have employers who are willing to work collaboratively and in partnership.

Table 1. Findings From the 19 Grey Area Resources Included in the Study (continued)

Authors (Year); Location	Katz et al. (2012); USA
Source	Disability and Work
Title	Strategies to support employer-driven initiatives to recruit and retain employees with disabilities
Salient Findings	This document discusses three employment support programs for persons with disabilities: (1) Bridges to Bridges; (2) Connecticut Industry-Specific Training and Placement Program; (3) Project SEARCH
	Bridges to Bridges acts as an intermediary business between employers and service providers. The program provides employers with evaluations of, and recommendations for, local service provider organizations. Through this program, employers are able to access a pool of quality, pre-screened employees with disabilities to meet their workforce needs without continually navigating the public and private social services and workforce systems for employee sourcing.
	Connecticut Industry-Specific Training and Placement Program offers grants to Community Rehabilitation Provider agencies to partner with a major employer on a disability employment initiative. Grant funding comes from Connecticut's allocation of federal vocational rehabilitation funds. The grants are for two years and the amount of each grant is based on the projected number of people employed.
	Project SEARCH offers supervisors training on the program model and common disability employment needs.
Authors (Year); Location	Alberta Works (2014); Canada
Source	*
Title	Recruiting and employing persons with disabilities.
Salient Findings	Community partners are an excellent resource as they understand business' talent needs and can help employers recruit and support talented people with disabilities.
Authors (Year); Location	Chénier & Vellone (2012); Canada
Source	The Conference Board of Canada
Title	Employers' toolkit: Making Ontario workplaces accessible to people with disabilities.
Salient Findings	Community organizations can assist employers by providing expertise related to accessibility, accommodations, or training (e.g., disability awareness/sensitivity training), candidate pre-screening, job coaching, pre-employment training, and information on best practices in recruitment and retention of people with disabilities at little or no cost to the employer. These community-based organizations include recruitment centres, community living centres, and employer networks.
	Umbrella employment support organizations such as Job Opportunity Information Network (JOIN), connect employers with appropriate community agencies to support the process of hiring and employing people with disabilities. In doing so, the organization assists employers with the following: (1) accessing job candidates; (2) connecting with other employers to hear the benefits of hiring people with disabilities; (3) mentoring job-ready people with disabilities.

* Same as author

Table 1. Findings From the 19 Grey Area Resources Included in the Study (continued)

Authors (Year); Location	European Commission (2012); Europe
Source	*
Title	Supported employment for people with disabilities in the EU and EFTA-EEA good practices and recommendations in support of a flexicurity approach.
Salient Findings	This document focuses on vital elements such as job coaching, disability training for staff, and long-term on-the-job support as effective strategies for supporting employment for people with disabilities.
	Job coaches were considered a key support for employers.
	Recommendations for employers hiring a job coach include providing the support worker with an adequate caseload, reasonable remuneration, quality training, and knowledge of employer competency requirements.
Authors (Year); Location	The National Autistic Society (2011); United Kingdom
Source	*
Title	Employing people with autism: A brief guide for employers
Salient Findings	This article suggests that appointing a mentor, collaborating with employment support agencies, employing a job coach, and arranging ASD awareness training for staff are viable methods for supporting employees with ASD and their employer.
	The role of employment service advisors in providing information on schemes and job programs were also discussed. These services can provide employers and employees with wage subsidies, workplace supports, interview support, advice on accommodations, assistance with transportation, adaptive aids, and employment support staff.
Authors (Year); Location	Westbrook et al. (2012); USA
Source	Campbell Systematic Reviews
Title	Adult employment assistance services for persons with autism spectrum disorders: Effects on employment outcomes
Salient Findings	This document highlights the importance of job coaching. Specifically, the use of behavioural techniques such as functional behavioural assessment, response cost procedure, positive reinforcement, social skills training, prompt fading, task analyses, and task preference assessments were reported as effective job supports.
	Natural supports, such as the use of co-workers to provide on-site training, social skills training, or transportation, have also been found to be effective in reducing the amount of training provided by the employment specialist.
	Long-term vocational support services were critical for sustaining employment and should involve both employees and employers.
	Though short-term vocational supports were important in helping individuals with ASD learn how to perform work tasks, long-term supports were needed for people with ASD to sustain employment and adapt to changes in the work.

* Same as author

Table 1. Findings From the 19 Grey Area Resources Included in the Study (continued)

Authors (Year); Location	European Commission (2014); Europe
Source	*
Title	Results of four pilot projects on employment of persons with autism
Salient Findings	Informing and training colleagues in the workplace as well as concerned persons in a wider environment of the private and public sector are important for successful integration of a person with ASD in workplace.
	The documents also discussed methods of raising awareness, which included workshops, individual meetings and trainings of managers and mentors, producing guidelines for work with persons with ASD, and contacts with employers to ensure consistency between business goals and corporate social responsibility initiatives.
	Job coaches and other experts, such as psychologists, special pedagogues, speech therapists etc., can assist employers with providing workplace accommodations.
Authors (Year); Location	The National Autistic Society (2004); United Kingdom
Source	*
Title	The undiscovered workforce
Salient Findings	There are financial and practical support programs in the UK to assist employers who hire individuals with ASD. Government supported agencies provide employers with information on financial assistance and incentives as well as any support which is available in the local area.
	Employment agencies can assist employers by providing on-the-job support to employees and offering professional advice, support, and training to managers and staff. Agencies can also help employers maximize the skills of employees with an ASD by assessing the work environment, advising on any adaptations or adjustments, and advising on the recruitment process. Agencies can assist employers by setting up work experience placements, job tasters (i.e., > 6 month job trials), short-term contracts, and permanent contracts.
Authors (Year); Location	Epilepsy Action (2013); United Kingdom
Source	*
Title	Work and epilepsy
Salient Findings	This document addresses the issue of reasonable adjustment or accommodation that is needed to be done while employing a person with epilepsy. This will ensure that the employee with epilepsy is not disadvantaged compared to other employees.
	Services such as Disability Employment Advisers provide a range of support, advice and information to people with disabilities. They can offer help if people are looking for a job, looking for training or need help to keep a job.

* Same as author

Table 1. Findings From the 19 Grey Area Resources Included in the Study (continued)

Authors (Year); Location	Office of Disability Employment Policy (2008); USA
Source	*
Title	Survey of employer perspectives on the employment of people with disabilities
Salient Findings	This document focuses on some of the challenges employers faced while hiring people with disability and services available for people with disabilities.
	One-Stop Career Centers are operated by state and local agencies and are designed to provide a full range of assistance to job seekers and employers in one location. The centers offer training referrals, career counselling, job listings, and other employment-related services.
	The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) was another service discussed in this document. Its mission is to facilitate the employment and retention of workers with disabilities by providing information on job accommodations, entrepreneurship, and related subjects.
Authors (Year); Location	The Job Accommodation Network (2009); USA
Source	*
Title	Employers' practical guide to reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act
Salient Findings	This document reveals that, according to the American Disability Act, an employer may be required to provide a temporary job coach to assist in the training of a qualified individual with a disability as a reasonable accommodation, barring undue hardship. An employer also may be required to allow a job coach paid by a public or private social service agency to accompany the employee at the job site as a reasonable accommodation.
Authors (Year); Location	Fesko & Butterworth (2001); USA
Source	Institute for Community Inclusion
Title	Conversion to integrated employment: Case studies of organizational change
Salient Findings	This document highlights the use of job coaching as an effective employment strategy for both employers and employees.
	The document also discusses strategies to make employee work experiences more meaningful, such as using a co-worker as support during conflict and switching places with a worker, allowing him or her to act as job coach.

* Same as author

Theme 1: Accommodation

Job accommodation was a main theme, occurring across ten documents. The majority of documents indicated that job accommodations play a vital role in increasing productivity and the overall development of people with DD. Job accommodations are perceived to help create equal employment opportunities so individuals with disability have opportunities for the same achievements as other employees (Chénier & Vellone, 2012; The Job Accommodation Network, 2009). Two documents, published by Alberta Works (2014) and the Office of Disability Employment Policy (2008), suggested that a major challenge that employers face when hiring individuals with disability is a lack of knowledge about the financial costs associated with accommodations. In addition, employers often overlooked effective hiring strategies such as a centralized accommodation fund and reassignment (Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2008). It is vital to note that documents showed low or no costs associated with employing a person with disability. For example, Fredeen, Martin, Birch, and Wafer (2012) reported that 57% of people with disability required no accommodation, and 37% of people with disability required only one accommodation, which cost the employer approximately $500.

Owens (2010) highlighted some of the most common requests for establishing reasonable accommodations. These included modification of testing and training materials, policies, and equipment. Another document that specifically focused on guidelines for employers hiring people with disability in Saskatchewan, Canada incorporated an entire chapter on job accommodation and its significance. This chapter provided in-depth information to employers about the value and advantages of job accommodation. The main focus of this chapter was on three main factors of job accommodation including, "modification of schedules and duties, removal of barriers through changes to the work environment, and providing supports including the purchase of assistive technology" (North East Community Partners for Inclusion, 2005, p. 26). In addition, Chénier & Vellone (2012) reinforced that it is vital that the employee's needs are heard when determining accommodations, as they have the best knowledge about what kind of accommodation may be most needed and beneficial in that particular organization or company.

Theme 2: Employment Support

A document of the European Commission (2012) delineated employment support into two subgroups: Job Assistance and Individual Support at the Workplace. Eight articles included in this review discussed the effectiveness of employment support for individuals with DD (Alberta Works, 2014; Dunst, Shogren, & Wehmeyer, 2015; European Commission, 2012; Fesko & Butterworth, 2001; Iyer & Masling, 2015; North East Community Partners for Inclusion, 2005; The National Autistic Society, 2011; Westbrook et al., 2012). Employment support was viewed as a practical employment approach and associated with positive outcomes for both employees and employers (Fesko & Butterworth, 2001; North East Community Partners for Inclusion, 2005). Supported employment refers to both principles and models that promote the integration of persons with disabilities into community workplaces with competitive pay. An array of supports may be provided, such as assistance with determining job matches with skills and interests, finding a job, and maintaining a job (Rashid et al., 2017). Supported employment was cost and time effective in relation to pre-screening of potential employees (North East Community Partners for Inclusion, 2005). The English, Scottish and Northern Irish Association of Supported Employment estimated that 30,000 individuals with a disability were involved in some kind of supported employment services, and that employers prefer to hire individuals with disability through supported employment (European Commission, 2012). However, studies from other jurisdictions suggested that there was lack of knowledge about disability related employment support. For example, 63% of employers from food services, and art and entertainment industries reported that a lack of knowledge about supported employment for individuals with disability was a major challenge (Alberta Works, 2014).

The significance of job coaching for people with DD was discussed in seven documents included in this review (European Commission, 2012; Fesko & Butterworth, 2001; Fredeen et al.,

2012; Iyer &Masling, 2015; Katz, O'Connell, & Nicholas, 2012; North East Community Partners for Inclusion, 2005; Westbrook et al., 2012). Documents included in our review indicated that job coaching plays a vital role in improving outcomes related to employing individuals with disability (Iyer &Masling, 2015). Some of the documents (North East Community Partners for Inclusion, 2005) indicate that long-term employment initiatives that included job coaching play a substantial role in creating a positive relationship between employer and employee. Moreover, numerous documents suggest that agencies that are involved in providing employment services to people with disability need to be involved in providing ongoing vocational rehabilitation (job coaching) and training activities to enhance job opportunities and success (European Commission, 2012; Fredeen et al., 2012; Katz et al., 2012). Agencies that were involved in providing supports for employers and employees with disability endorsed job coaching to provide assistance well suited for the specific needs of the potential employee. Job coaching was viewed as the backbone of achieving the required performance standard (European Commission, 2012).

Theme 3: Education and Awareness Training

Ten documents discussed the value of education and awareness training for employers, colleagues, and individuals with disability (Alberta Works, 2014; Chénier & Vellone, 2012; European Commission, 2012; Fredeen et al., 2012; Iyer &Masling, 2015; Martin, Jamrog, Lykins, & Davis, 2014; North East Community Partners for Inclusion, 2005; Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2008; The Job Accommodation Network, 2009; Westbrook et al., 2012). One document stated that disability awareness training was vital in relation to cost efficiency, added to the value of workplace inclusivity, and attracted more individuals with disability to the workplace (Iyer & Masling, 2015). Disability awareness training enabled in-depth understanding and created a sensitive environment, which increased openness and willingness to hire and accept people with disability in the workforce (North East Community Partners for Inclusion, 2005). In addition, disability education and training

was recommended to employers who have not yet employed a person with disability (Martin el al., 2014). One document showed that most companies were eager to hire people with disability. However, there was constant need to provide education and disability awareness training to employers to improve inclusion of individuals with disability in the workforce, and especially to maximize their potential (Alberta Works, 2014; Fredeen et al., 2012). The lack of education and training for people with disability has been identified as a major barrier for their employability (Alberta Works, 2014), and changing attitudes in the workforce through education and awareness training has been suggested as a way to enhance everyone's comfort (Chénier & Vellone, 2012). In fact, one report identified ASD awareness training as the most effective and successful strategy for employees with ASD (Westbrook et al., 2012). It is evident from the findings in this review that increasing disability education and awareness increases the number of companies that recruit individuals with DD, and plays a significant role in decision making related to hiring employees with disability (Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2008).

Theme 4: Recruitment

Another theme that emerged throughout the documents addressed the recruitment of individuals with disability. This theme was evident in ten documents (Alberta Works, 2014; Chénier & Vellone, 2012; European Commission, 2012; Fredeen et al., 2012; Iyer & Masling, 2015; Katz et al., 2012; Martin el at., 2014; North East Community Partners for Inclusion, 2005; The Job Accommodation Network, 2009; The National Autistic Society, 2004). One document estimated that 40% of individuals with disability were recruited through employee referral and 52% were recruited through newspaper advertisements targeted at people with disability (North East Community Partners for Inclusion, 2005). It has also been recommended that successful recruitment may be done through collaboration with community-based partners (Iyer &Masling, 2015), or programs such as the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP) or Skills Training Partnership (STP) (Chénier & Vellone (2012). These programs were developed to help recruit motivated young people with disability into the

labour force, and help employers support hiring employees with disability into their businesses (Chénier & Vellone, 2012; Martin et al., 2014; The Job Accommodation Network, 2009). Many companies, such as Walgreens, Lowe's, Toys R Us, and Proctor and Gamble, are actively involved in establishing connections and streamlining recruitment processes in an effort to bring more individuals with disabilities into their companies (Katz et al., 2012), suggesting increasing interest in hiring individuals with disabilities into the current labour market. Alternatively, one document included in this review stated that, despite employment opportunities, individuals with ASD are tremendously disadvantaged in the process of recruitment (The National Autistic Society, 2004).

Discussion

This synthesis review of grey literature reveals several key findings. Accommodation in the workplace was a main theme that emerged in numerous documents. It became evident that accommodation for employing individuals with DD was perceived to be most effective in supporting overall productivity and individual growth in the workplace. In addition, employment support and job coaching were identified as vital supports that need to be part of employment for people with DD. Education, awareness training and recruitment also emerged as main themes in the documents. In addition, it is vital to note that some of our findings are in line with the results from our recent review of the peer-reviewed literature related to enhancing employer capacity to support employment of individuals with DD (Rashid, Hodgetts, & Nicholas, 2017). Existing peered review literature indicated that employers perceive disability awareness training and education played a significant role in building their capacity to supporting individuals with DD in meaningful work opportunities (Howlin, Alcock & Burkin, 2005).These findings highlight the need for further enhanced investment of available resources, supports, and services to improve vocational outcomes for individuals with DD. Our findings related to supported employment have also been acknowledged by existing peer review literature, which highlights the importance of supported employment when employing individuals with DD. For example,

Unger (1999) reported that supported employment was deemed to be the most effective strategy for employees with DD. Furthermore, we found that accommodations were vital for overall growth and success of an individual with DD in the workplace, and, consistent with the grey literature, generally associated with low costs. However, employers often have a misconception that employment accommodations for people with DD are expensive, so employers are often reluctant to employ people with DD (Hernandez et al., 2008).

As evidenced by the cohesive themes that emerged from our data, we found that the substantive content was very similar across the documents reviewed. In addition to the key themes that emerged in our results, there were some redundancies across documents that did not amount to major themes. For instance, retention of employees with DD in the workforce was documented in three reports (Chénier & Vellone, 2012; Iyer & Masling, 2015; Katz et al., 2012). Based on the similarity across reports retrieved from a variety of organizations, we suggest that one comprehensive and openly available document may be a good use of resources, instead of so many independent organizations creating their own. We believe that the creation and dissemination of a gold standard best practices guide would be ideal for employers who are hiring people with DD.

Findings from this review point to vital gaps in the current grey literature in relation to employing individuals with DD. Numerous documents have been produced by various organizations, such as government agencies working to enable employment opportunities for people with DD (Iyer & Masling, 2015), employment support perspectives (North East Community Partners for Inclusion, 2005), and the perspectives of friends and family members of individuals with disability (Fredeen et al., 2012). However, there were no documents that focused on the direct perspective of individuals with DD. Their perspectives need to be incorporated into future literature. Articulation of experiences and identification of gaps and needs based on first-hand experiences will offer employers insight that will help them develop better employment opportunities, refine or develop training programs to best meet needs, inform priorities in policy development and

employment support services. Therefore, our literature re review highlights the need for future research that helps understand the lived experiences of people with DD in relation finding a job. Importantly, this research should creatively incorporate perspectives of people across the spectrum of disability, including those who are minimally verbal, those with "hidden" versus visible disability, and those with intellectual impairment. In-depth research will enable us to gain first-hand information from participants and accordingly develop policies and programs that will lead to better employment capacity for individuals with DD.

The majority of the documents reviewed in this study do not emphasize strategies for better communication amongst employers, co-workers and employees, nor the resulting positive impact of increased communication for employers and their business growth. Only one document addressed elements for effective communication strategies and communication supports for employees with DD (Chénier & Vellone, 2012). There were few documents that highlighted the importance and effectiveness of solid communication in a general manner in the workplace (Dunst et al., 2015; Fesko & Butterworth, 2001; Westbrook et al., 2012). In addition, only one document indicated that people with ASD may have difficulty communicating and often are unable to read facial expressions or other non-verbal cues (The National Autistic Society, 2004). The lack of emphasis on communication skills and lack of focus on developing communication strategies relevant to employing people with DD emerges as a gap in this literature. Hence, we recommend that more research be conducted on developing communication strategies that may be appropriate when employing individuals with DD.

Strengths and Limitations

A main limitation of this review was that we had limited the search to English language and there may be documents in other languages that may have been missed. Despite these limitations, this review has numerous strengths. A thorough search was conducted with an experienced librarian. In addition, the search was diverse in nature as it included varied docu-

ments such as government reports, policy related documents, tool kits for employers and other informative documents related to the needs and demands of employing individuals with DD.

Conclusions

The evidence from this synthesis review provides a strong platform to understand the accessible grey literature focused on services, supports and strategies that foster employers' capacity to support employment for adults with DD. It reinforces the value of sustained, and potentially increased, funding for programs and services that are well suited to employers' needs for hiring people with DD.

Key Messages From This Article

People with disabilities. Individuals with DD and ASD will benefit from this review by gaining knowledge about what is available for them in the existing literature about vital topics such as recruitment, job coaching and employment support.

Professionals. This work will effectively summaries existing grey literature for professionals who are often busy to read every documents in-depth which exists about building capacity development for people with disabilities.

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