Review VR
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CAREER PATHWAYS ADVANCEMENT PROJECT 2.0
Evaluation Brief Series

What do CPAP 2.0 Participants say about the Program?

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Background

The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts Boston has been the independent evaluator of the Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Career Pathways Advancement Project (CPAP) since 2015. Nebraska VR first piloted the CPAP model as one of four state VR agency grantees funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) to carry out a five-year Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities demonstration project. Building on the success of the CPAP 1.0, in 2021, Nebraska VR was awarded a second model demonstration grant funded by the RSA to build on and expand the CPAP model (known as "CPAP 2.0") for an additional five years.

For CPAP 2.0, Nebraska VR expanded both the target population and the number of targeted industries and businesses across the state. By expanding the target population and industries, the project can serve and test its applicability to a broader range of job seekers who are more reflective of the overall population being served by Nebraska VR.

Introduction

One of the components of the evaluation process includes qualitative interviews with current CPAP 2.0 clients. These interviews aimed to gather the perspectives and experiences of CPAP 2.0 clients on what motivates them to participate, what services and supports they receive, and their career advancement process. During this effort, the ICI team conducted phone and Zoom interviews with 14 individuals. All participants had begun receiving services from CPAP 2.0. This brief will discuss the major findings from these interviews.

> *"I'm tired of being poor. I have lived below the poverty level, all of my adult life–some of that my fault, and some of it not. And I don't need a Lexus you know or anything like that. But…I'd like to be able to have a job that occasionally gave me some vacation [to visit family]. I'd like to be able to go out and eat once in a while at places that I like. I'd like to be able to certainly have enough money to retire when I'm seventy – I hope, if I live."*

Method and Participants

In collaboration with the CPAP 2.0 team, ICI asked CPAP 2.0 participants for their input and feedback on the project. ICI completed interviews with 14 participants, all of whom had begun receiving services from CPAP 2.0. The characteristics of the participants are outlined in the following table.

Demographic Characteristics	Interview Participants
Race	Majority white, 1 Native American, 1 African American, 1 Hispanic
Sex	64% women, 36% men
Language	29% spoke a language other than English at home
Age	28–63, average 46
Disabilities	54% mental health and/or substance use 29% physical disability 21% learning disability 14% chronic illness
Employment	79% were employed either full or part time

Preliminary Findings

From the interviews, CPAP 2.0 participants distinguished the impact of CPAP 2.0 into four categories:

1. Meaning of Career Advancement
2. Financial Support
3. Emotional Support throughout the Process
4. Confidence Building

Impact of CPAP 2.0

Meaning of Career Advancement

Interviewees were looking forward to beginning or completing their educational programs and advancing in their careers. Individuals defined career advancement in many different ways. What does career advancement mean for the participants?

1. ***Increased wages***

   Maybe, hopefully move up in the pay scale and then also better hours. Maybe, you know, I've always been required to take call. You know, something where not a whole lot of call or weekend involvement.

2. ***Stability and planning for the future***

   I hate to sound mercenary but making more money. I'm tired of being poor. I have lived below the poverty level, all of my adult life–some of that my fault, and some of it not. And I don't need a Lexus you know or anything like that. But…I'd like to be able to have a job that occasionally gave me some vacation [to visit family]. I'd like to be able to go out and eat once in a while at places that I like. I'd like to be able to certainly have enough money to retire when I'm seventy – I hope, if I live.

3. ***Feeling accomplished from doing something worthwhile and moving into positions that better suit their skills, capabilities, and interests***

   It's not really something I learned, it's something I've always known about it was— you know, it just wasn't, didn't used to really be priority or convenient for me to do that stuff. It was I guess just one, being sober and making better decisions is the main thing… you know, taking the small steps to achieve these goals, you know, allowed me to plan ahead of time and, you know, not just jump into things or jump from one thing to another where I'm able to, you know, have a plan for what I want to do and what I want to get done.

4. ***Exploring opportunities***

   After I've gotten these classes, if one of those positions opened up, even if it involved relocating, I might apply for it. So, it's kind of hard to say, but it's wonderful to be in a situation where you can apply for it if you want, but you don't really feel like you need it because you're very happy where one is now.

   It's kind of hard to pinpoint. It's just the good, the cool thing is the options part. So, you're not just like, "Well, you are here, deal with it," kind of deal.

5. ***Ability to grow and self-improve***

   I guess more than anything it shows me that I can do it and that I can be there not just for my family but for my community and the surrounding communities that need help….So I think it's just the drive that this could help me at home with my family, pay bills. It could help me show my girls that I can do it and show myself that I can do it.

Financial Support

The participants reported that without CPAP 2.0's monetary funds and financial support, accessing the necessary prerequisites to their career advancement would not have been possible or feasible.

I'm just kind of grateful for all the help overall. Cause it's very confusing to try to just navigate any of this stuff by yourself, so all of it feels like a gift almost. Yeah, and even with the first CPAP grant, I did not realize how much it took to just be a mechanic. The licenses that you have to pay for. And there

are classes you have to take...those were all paid for. And that's not something that I would've been to afford. And that's not something most people can afford—it actually keeps you out of those professions... [And] anywhere that I've ever worked, they won't hire you unless you have your own tools, and...they're pretty expensive, ...[so] without their help in doing that I really wouldn't have been able to get a job in that field. So, you know, that was a big help for me.

Emotional Support throughout the Process:

Some interviewees reported the emotional aspect of the support that CPAP 2.0 provided as the most influential factor in their decision to pursue any career advancement opportunities.

I don't think I would've. I don't know. I mean maybe—no, I really don't. I think it [CPAP 2.0] pushed me to—and it made me think, 'You know, I didn't finish this. There must be a reason why this is...' I know that sounds so woo-woo or whatever, but I just kind of felt like that there was something telling me that I had some unfinished business, and it was almost like a godsend. Like, 'Hey, you need to do this.' So, no, I probably wouldn't have done it. I don't think.

Confidence Building

A few participants reported that the support they received from CPAP 2.0 has made them more confident to advocate for themselves and make use of the resources available to them.

But this time around in school...I'm actually going to use all the help that they give me for tutoring. VR will pay for tutoring and stuff like that also, if you're having problems with your classes. And last time I just kind of suffered through it.

Conclusion and Next Steps

In general, CPAP 2.0 participants reported being satisfied with their experiences in CPAP 2.0 and regarded CPAP 2.0 as an opportunity for future career advancement. Additionally, participants had cultivated positive relationships with their counselors and welcomed the idea of more follow-up from their CPAP 2.0 team. Most of the participants use the CPAP 2.0 services to pay for further education and training, and the focused scope of the program seems to have given participants a clearer path to career advancement.

The screening survey is open for CPAP 2.0 participants to sign up for interviews on a rolling basis. The evaluation team plans to conduct a second round of interviews approximately one year after the first round of interviews to follow the experiences of people enrolled in the CPAP 2.0 as they continue along their career advancement journeys.

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VISIT: Nebraska VR's CPAP website to learn more about this effort.

ACCESS: ICI's Career Pathways Toolkit

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