

Family Employment Awareness Training (FEAT) in Kansas: Description of a family-focused intervention and the rationale supporting it

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Abstract.

BACKGROUND: In 2010-2012, the Kansas Division on Health Care Finance used Medicaid Infrastructure Grant monies to fund the development and implementation of an employment intervention for young adults with disabilities and their families. Family Employment Awareness Training (FEAT), a family-focused employment intervention, had two major goals: (a) increase participants' expectations for the competitive employment of people with individualized support needs (ISN) in their community and (b) increase participants' knowledge of state and federal employment resources to support the employment of people with ISN. Short- and intermediate-term research indicates that FEAT increased participants' expectations and knowledge (Francis, Gross, Turnbull, & Parent-Johnson, 2013; Francis, Gross, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 2013) and impacted long-term employment outcomes (Francis, Gross, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 2015).

OBJECTIVE: In this manuscript, we provide a detailed description of FEAT, discuss the challenges of implementing it, and share future directions for this family-focused intervention.

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION: FEAT is a two-day, family-focused intervention designed to increase expectations and knowledge regarding the employment of people with disabilities. FEAT was iteratively designed, incorporating stakeholder feedback, resulting in model emphasizing small group activities, networking, and technical assistance.

CONCLUSION: Currently, more rigorous research is being conducted to assess FEAT's efficacy. Future plans include adapting the model to other domains (e.g., housing, community participation) and other target populations (e.g., teachers, employment specialists).

Keywords: Customized employment, expectations, family intervention, knowledge-based intervention, competitive employment

1. Introduction

People with disabilities who have individualized support needs (ISN), requiring “services, supports, accommodations, or modifications over and above what is available to all employees in order to experience

success at competitive jobs” (Francis, Gross, Turnbull, & Parent-Johnson, 2013, p. 44), are often employed in segregated working environments (i.e., day centers, sheltered workshops, enclave settings) for subminimum wage working only with peers with disabilities (Migliore, Grossi, Mank, & Rogan, 2008; National Disability Rights Network, 2011). Transitioning from school to competitive employment (i.e., employment in community settings with non-disabled peers for minimum wage or higher) can be a very complicated

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and challenging experience for young adults with ISN and their families. However, research has shown that high expectations for employment (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2011; Timmons, Hall, Bose, Wolfe, & Winsor, 2011) and knowledge and use of employment resources play an influential role in the post-secondary employment outcomes of young adults with ISN (Dutta, Gerver, Chan, Chou, & Ditchman, 2008). Family Employment Awareness Training (FEAT) is a family-focused intervention that was created and implemented in 2010–2012 through a partnership between the Beach Center on Disability at the University of Kansas, Kansas Division on Health Care Finance (Kansas' state Medicaid agency), and Families Together, Inc. (Kansas' Parent Training and Information Center). FEAT was designed to help families and their members with ISN develop high expectations for employment and gain knowledge about competitive employment resources.

Research on the immediate and intermediate outcomes indicated that attending FEAT resulted in positive outcomes for participants. In 2010–2012, the FEAT team (Beach Center on Disability and Families Together, Inc.) administered a brief pre- and post-training pilot questionnaire to gain information about attendees' expectations for employment, knowledge of transition to employment, and feedback regarding content and format. Attendees reported increased expectations for competitive employment and improved knowledge following FEAT attendance (Francis, Gross, Turnbull, & Parent-Johnson, 2013).

In 2012, we conducted a mixed-methods follow-up study (survey and interview) to assess the intermediate influence of FEAT, better understand the journey to employment of families with members with significant support needs and the barriers encountered along the way (Francis, 2013). Results indicated that participants rated their expectations for employment as average and knowledge of employment resources as above average (Francis, Gross, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 2013). This finding was encouraging, considering the low expectations participants reported prior to attending FEAT 1–2 years earlier (Francis, Gross, Turnbull, & Parent-Johnson, 2013). Data from our follow-up study also indicated that FEAT attendees accessed employment resources, used FEAT resources, and, in some cases, attained competitive employment outcomes one to two years following FEAT (Francis, Gross, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 2015). Further, nearly 70% of participants reported that FEAT positively influenced the way they help their family members with significant support needs attain and/or maintain competitive employment.

In 2013, we were awarded a NIDRR-Field Initiated (NIDRR-FI) grant to conduct a more rigorous, quasi-experimental (attendees and non-attendees), mixed-methods (survey and interview) study of the short- and intermediate-term impacts of FEAT in Kansas. For the NIDRR-FI, our partners are: (a) Kansas Parent Training and Information (PTI) Centers (Families Together, Inc.), (b) Kansas public schools and (c) Kansas Workforce Centers. Our Families Together, Inc. partners implement the trainings and provide technical assistance to families. Our school partners aid in the recruitment of families and teachers to participate in the research and attend FEAT. Our Workforce Center partners assist the PTI in providing scheduled follow-up technical assistance in the Center to FEAT attendees twice, at three and nine months post-FEAT.

FEAT is an effective, dynamic, family-focused, employment intervention designed for and implemented in the state of Kansas. The purpose of this manuscript is to (a) provide a detailed description of FEAT as implemented in Kansas, (b) discuss the challenges of implementing it, and (c) share future directions for this family-focused intervention.

2. Family Employment Awareness Training (FEAT)

2.1. FEAT format

The FEAT format consists of a (a) two-part training, (b) small group activities to support applying new knowledge, (c) networking opportunities, and (d) technical assistance.

2.1.1. Two-part training

In Part One of FEAT, *Building the Dream of Employment*, we sought to build the expectations of participants for competitive employment outcomes. Participants learned about (a) FEAT; (b) state Employment First policy supporting competitive employment of persons with disabilities; (c) different types of supported and customized employment options and employment success stories of Kansans with disabilities; (d) family/parent role in supporting employment; and (e) school and healthcare transition. Part One included lecture, small-group activities, small- and whole-group discussion, and a young adult breakout session on job development. Part One also included an afternoon of small group presentations and discussions with local community

(a) employees with disabilities working in integrated and competitive environments, (b) employers and managers who support employees with disabilities, and (c) entrepreneurs with disabilities who have started their own business.

In Part Two of FEAT, *Identifying and Accessing Employment Resources*, we worked to enhance participants' knowledge of employment resources available to Kansans. Participants learned about (a) on-the-job support resources for employees and employers, (b) state and federal employment resources, and (c) state and federal antidiscrimination laws. Part Two included lecture, small-group activities, and a young adult breakout session on self-advocacy and disability disclosure. Like Part One, Part Two also included an afternoon of small group presentations and discussions with representatives from the local community: (a) funding sources (e.g., cash assistance programs, business development grants, Medicaid waivers, work incentives), (b) service programs and agencies (e.g., community rehabilitation providers, Workforce Centers, Medicaid buy-in programs, benefits specialists), and (c) information organizations (e.g., business start-up, assistive technology). Given the depth and breadth of information discussed at FEAT, we found it instrumental to provide participants with the opportunity to apply this information.

2.1.2. Activities to support applying new knowledge

To achieve maximum acquisition of new knowledge, adult learners need face-to-face instruction, discussion, and activities that facilitate practical application of new information (Hall, 2007). As a result, we incorporated individual and small group discussion activities for families and their young adult members with ISN. Activities included (a) identifying the young adult's preferences and interests and brainstorming job ideas, (b) inviting support from others in the community, (c) identifying the young adult's support needs and employment resources to address those needs, (d) discussing disability disclosure and self-advocacy, and (e) developing an action plan to apply the new knowledge acquired from FEAT following attendance. If participants completed all small group activities, they left with the starting points for having an employment planning meeting, writing a transition plan or an Individualized Plan for Employment, and/or accessing and using employment resources. Further, participating in group-activities helped participants to gain alternative perspectives and connect with

families going through the same experiences in their community.

2.1.3. Networking

Research on parents of individuals with ISN indicated that families learn best when information is delivered through personal contact with individuals who have experienced the topics (Ison et al., 2010). Such personal contacts may include educators (Lian & Fantanex-Phelan, 2001; Zions, Zions, Harrison, & Bellinger, 2003) or a trusted ally, such as another parent with similar experiences (Blue-Banning, Turnbull, & Pereira, 2000; Leake & Cholymay, 2004; Ruef & Turnbull, 2001; Shapiro, Monzo, Rueda, Gomez, & Blacher, 2004). It is precisely for this reason that we devoted two half-days to networking. For Part One of FEAT, *Building the Dream of Employment*, we invited competitively employed young adults and entrepreneurs and their families to come and share their employment experiences with attendees. For Part Two of FEAT, *Identifying and Accessing Employment Resources*, we invited representatives of the employment resources we discussed to come and share about their organization and the supports and services they provided.

At these networking opportunities, families were able to meet others in their community modeling competitive employment of people with ISN and ask questions about their experiences. Families also had the opportunity to meet local resource representatives, learn about the supports and services available through the resource, and ask questions specific to their needs or concerns. Being able to make those direct, personal connections and see what is available in their own community provided participants with "a much wider base to draw from for support," as one participant described it (Francis, Gross, Turnbull, & Parent-Johnson, 2013, pg. 51).

2.1.4. Technical assistance

Providing technical assistance following training increases the likelihood of participants mastering knowledge (Joyce & Showers, 2002). We provided technical assistance in two ways: upon request and at scheduled intervals. At the training, families could request follow-up assistance from the PTI regional office that hosted the training by selecting that option and providing contact information on their action Plan for Employment. Additionally, at the end of training, participants were provided direct contact information for the PTI and University FEAT presenters so they

could initiate a request for assistance via phone or email. Technical assistance consisted of a check-in via phone or email to see how the family was doing in accomplishing the five next steps they identified on their action Plan for Employment. From that contact (or a contact initiated by the family following training), we provided additional support on an individualized basis. In-person support included brainstorming sessions to review what had been accomplished and next steps, identify possible job options considering the young adult's preferences, and identify support resources.

We also are now providing follow-up technical assistance meetings at scheduled intervals: three months and nine months post-FEAT. Workforce Center and PTI partners provide technical assistance at Workforce Centers in communities where FEAT was held. By inviting families to a scheduled group technical assistance meeting, we offer families who may not have requested individual support a chance to receive additional support in a group setting. By offering it at two different times within the first year following FEAT, we provide families with additional opportunities to address newly encountered barriers along the journey to employment. Finally, by holding the meetings in Workforce Centers, we provide ready access to Center services and opportunities for families to learn more about that resource.

2.2. FEAT development and implementation

In the development of FEAT, we incorporated stakeholder feedback to modify the curriculum and format. In the implementation of FEAT, we utilized a "train-the-trainer" model to deliver trainings across Kansas. Below we describe both of these components.

2.2.1. Development – incorporation of stakeholder feedback

The FEAT team employed design-based research methodology to design, develop, and pilot FEAT (Kelly, Lesh, & Baek, 2008; van den Akker, Gravemeijer, McKenney, & Nieveen, 2006). Design-based research is a systematic but flexible method that focuses on collaboration between researchers and study participants (Wang & Hannafin, 2005, p. 6). The most salient principle described in the design research literature is the presence of an iterative process involving a multi-phase approach of redesigning curriculum, materials, and training format based on participant feedback (Plomp & Nieveen, 2009; Reinking & Bradley, 2008). We iteratively incorporated trainer and participant feedback in the development of FEAT through training evaluations,

surveys, and interviews. Our participants noted aspects of FEAT they liked (e.g., networking) and disliked (e.g., information overload), and provided suggestions for enhancement (e.g., expanding FEAT to schools; Francis, Gross, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 2013).

2.2.1.1. Trainer feedback

We solicited feedback from Families Together, Inc. trainers at multiple points in time: (a) following the first "train-the-trainers" training in a project team meeting, (b) at the time of local training implementation in their office's region, (c) through a short survey at the end of the first year, and (d) in training refresher webinars. In addition, the project coordinator maintained regular email and phone contact with FEAT trainers from Families Together, Inc. throughout the project, ensuring that the training was functional and addressing real problems facing families seeking employment for their young adults with ISN. We consulted with them and incorporated feedback about the content of our curriculum and methods for delivering it.

2.2.1.2. Participant feedback

We used pre-post FEAT questionnaires and a training evaluation form to evaluate participant outcomes and solicit participant feedback (Francis, Gross, Turnbull, & Parent-Johnson, 2013). The results of the questionnaires and training evaluations informed the FEAT training format. For example, participant recommendations prompted the development of the young adult breakout sessions, the expansion from a one-day to a two-part training, and increased time devoted to networking with community representatives.

2.2.2. Implementation – "train-the-trainer" model

In implementing FEAT, the Beach Center on Disability partnered with Families Together, Inc. (Kansas' state PTI) using a train-the-trainer model. "Train-the-trainer" is a recognized method of outreach (National Council on Disability, 2003) that allows the dissemination of information through trusted local community members (e.g., parent training and information centers), allowing the community to maintain the knowledge and use it to address the concerns of its members (families with a member with ISN). Families Together center directors and parent information specialists attended a FEAT training hosted by the Beach Center on Disability to learn the training content and understand the organization of the training and each of its essential components. Following the training, project staff met with our partners to discuss the training format, answer questions,

and address how to localize the content and involve area community representatives in their FEAT trainings.

Trainers were provided with a scripted manual, which provided notes for each PowerPoint slide and references for annual updates to the curriculum content to facilitate ease of updating as programs and funding sources change. Additionally, in 2014, Families Together, Inc. staff attended eight one-hour webinar trainings, each designed to target a specific training topic and related curriculum materials to familiarize experienced and novice Families Together, Inc. staff regarding the FEAT curriculum.

2.3. FEAT curriculum

We conducted rigorous searches among current literature, reports, policies, programs, and agencies to identify best practices related to employment. We used this information to develop the foundation of the FEAT curriculum. Then we infused FEAT with information related to (a) Employment First policy in Kansas, (b) supported and customized employment options, (c) the role of family in supporting employment, (d) transition from school to work, (e) transition from pediatric to adult healthcare, and (f) employment resources. Table 1 includes a full list of FEAT curriculum topics, sub-topics, and training activities.

2.3.1. Employment first policy

Employment First policy in Kansas, established in May 2011, provides that “competitive and integrated employment shall be considered the first option when serving persons with disabilities who are of working age to obtain employment” (Kansas House Bill No. 2336, 2011). FEAT included information about this Kansas legislation and the impact it should have on visits with rehabilitation specialists and case managers when discussing service needs. We ensured that participants understood that this law prevents service providers from choosing no work or segregated work as the first service option for the young adult with ISN.

2.3.2. Supported and customized employment

Instead of leaving the types of employment options abstract through only citing evidence-based research and defining the methods (e.g., carved, created, resource ownership, business within a business, self-employment), we incorporated the use of real examples of successful supported and customized employment. Parents often prefer information to be shared in a reader-friendly style using a variety of formats, especially

stories (Edinippulige, 2007; Ruef & Turnbull, 2001). Therefore, we gathered success stories of individuals with ISN employed in Kansas and obtained permission to share stories gathered by other professionals. Providing families stories of Kansans with ISN working in both urban and rural communities allowed training participants to see how competitive employment was possible in their own backyard.

2.3.3. The role of family

We focused on the role of family in employment because families are the most influential persons in the lives of people with ISN and, thus, the most likely to influence competitive employment outcomes (Defur, Todd-Allen, & Getzel, 2001; Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act [DD Act], 2000; Timmons et al., 2011). We discussed the role of family in assisting in the employment process and in forming partnerships with professionals working with their young adult with ISN. Specifically we discussed activities related to brainstorming, problem-solving, and networking, and used the “seven principles of partnerships” (Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak, & Shogren, 2011, p. 141) to help participants understand strategies for successful partnerships.

2.3.4. Transition from school to work

Transition from school to work is challenging, and families of young adults with ISN often report feeling uninformed about transition planning (Chambers, Hughes, Carter, 2004; Geenen, Powers, Lopez-Vasquez, & Bersani, 2003; King, Baldwin, Currie, & Evans, 2006; Kraemer & Blacher, 2001; Larson et al., 2011), putting them at a disadvantage in supporting their family member. This is why FEAT discusses transition planning, IDEA transition provisions, the planning process, and what constitutes quality transition services.

2.3.5. Transition from pediatric to adult healthcare

Healthcare is important for successful employment, and young adults with ISN need to be able to advocate for themselves related to their healthcare and associated work accommodations (U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2013). As a result, we discussed transitioning from pediatric to adult healthcare during FEAT. We highlighted general health, oral health, methods for paying for healthcare, the importance of preventative healthcare in maintaining successful employment, and self-advocacy for needed accommodations.

Table 1
FEAT curriculum topics, sub-topics, and training activities

Topics	Sub-topics	Training Activities
Supported and customized competitive employment options	Carved jobs	Lecture (PowerPoint, videos, success stories)
	Created jobs	
	Resource ownership	Community speakers (employees, employers, and entrepreneurs)
	Self-employment	Small group activity (job preferences)
Family role in supporting employment	Business within a business	Youth session (job preferences and support needs)
	Employer-initiated models	
	Building a support network	Lecture
Transition to adulthood	Contributing to the employment process	Opportunities for networking
	Creating parent-professional partnerships	Creating an action plan for employment
Support resources	School to work	Lecture
	Healthcare	Youth session
	Employee resources - assistive technology, natural supports, job coaches, benefits specialist	Lecture
Systems navigation	Employer resources - local and national organizations providing services and supports to employers of persons with ISN	Community speakers (organization and agency representatives)
	Case managers	Resource CD
	Career one-stop/Workforce centers	Lecture
Employment services and supports		Community speakers (organization and agency representatives)
	Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)	Lecture
	Ticket to Work	Community speakers (organization and agency representatives)
	Kansas Medicaid (i.e., waivers and buy-in programs)	Resource CD
	Community rehabilitation providers	Opportunities for networking
Funding and information	Transportation	Small group activity (support needs and resources)
	Work incentives (e.g., PASS, IRWE, 1619b)	
	Kansas Council on Developmental Disabilities	Lecture
Antidiscrimination policy	Small Business Administration (i.e., development centers, SCORE, women's business centers)	Community speakers (organization and agency representatives)
	Kansas Disability Service Maps	Resource CD
	Federal (i.e., Americans with Disabilities Act, Section 504)	Lecture
	State (i.e., Employment First policy, Kansas Act Against Discrimination)	Youth sessions (disability disclosure and self-advocacy)
		Resource CD

Note. FEAT curriculum. Reprinted with permission from "The Family Employment Awareness Training: A Mixed Method Follow-up," by G.F. Francis, J.M.S. Gross, A. Turnbull, and R. Turnbull, 2013, *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 39, p. 167-181.

2.3.6. Employment resources

Access to and use of employment resources plays an important role in a young adult with ISN obtaining and maintaining a competitive employment position. Young adults with ISN often require the coordination of multiple adult service agencies and organizations to support their employment (Landmark, Ju, & Zhang, 2010). Understanding and navigating this web of

uncoordinated resources is difficult for families (U.S. GAO, 2012) who often report lacking adequate information to do so (King et al., 2006; Larson et al., 2011). To address this knowledge gap, FEAT teaches families about (a) employer and employee supports; (b) federal, state, and local employment resources; and (c) antidiscrimination laws, including the rights and responsibilities of the employee and employer.

2.3.6.1. *Employer and employee supports*

During FEAT, we discussed resources for both the employer and the employee, even though employers were not attendees, because employers frequently are unprepared to provide supports for employees with a disability (Timmons et al., 2011). If an employer is unprepared to provide supports, the young adult with ISN is more likely to lose the job (Blitz & Mechanic, 2006; Hall & Parker, 2010). Discussing the types of supports available to employers empowers families to educate and support employers who may be reluctant to hire someone with a disability. Discussing the employee supports (i.e., benefits specialists, assistive technology, natural supports, and job coaches) that are essential to the success at and maintenance of the job over time empowers families to seek out needed on-the-job supports.

2.3.6.2. *Federal, state, and local employment resources*

We spent a substantial amount of time discussing the federal, state, and local employment resources that could be braided together to provide needed services and funding to support the young adult with ISN to attain and maintain employment over time. Formal supports are essential for people with ISN to achieve competitive employment (Burge, Ouellette-Kuntz, & Lysaght, 2007; National Disability Rights Network, 2011). Some such resources included in FEAT were Social Security benefits and work incentives, Medicaid programs, Vocational Rehabilitation services, Centers for Independent Living, Community Mental Health Centers, individual development accounts, Career One-stop and Workforce Centers, assistive technology and small business development organizations.

2.3.6.3. *Antidiscrimination laws*

It is imperative that families and people with ISN are aware of their rights and responsibilities under state and federal law with regard to employment discrimination and accommodations so that they may make informed decisions and advocate appropriately (Lindsay, McDougall, & Sanford, 2013). At FEAT, we discussed both federal and state antidiscrimination laws, including the rights and responsibilities of both the employee with ISN and employer regarding disability disclosure and accommodations both during the application process and on the job. We discussed the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Kansas Act Against Discrimination, and Kansas Employment First legislation,

all of which are designed to protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination, ensure accessibility, and make competitive employment the first option for individuals with disabilities. At this time in the training, we offered a young adult breakout session on disability disclosure and self-advocacy during which the participating young adults discussed the pros and cons of disability disclosure, how to do it and what to say should you choose to disclose.

2.4. *FEAT accessibility*

We addressed accessibility in three ways through the development of: (a) young adult breakout sessions, (b) training materials, and (c) Spanish translations and trainings.

2.4.1. *Young adult breakout sessions*

Feedback from our post-questionnaires in year one of the project indicated that families and young adults with ISN desired breakout sessions specifically tailored to the young adults. As a result, we created a breakout session for each day of FEAT, using parts of a workbook developed by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (2005) as a framework for these sessions. The session in Part One focused on job development. During this session a FEAT trainer worked with the young adults to (a) determine their interests, strengths, and areas of need, (b) brainstorm jobs that match these characteristics, and (c) develop a list of self-identified supports, accommodations and modifications that they would need to be successful at work. The session in Part Two focused on self-advocacy and disability disclosure. During this session the FEAT trainer (a) defined disclosure and discussed the right not to disclose, (b) worked with participants to brainstorm the advantages and disadvantages of disclosing, and (c) and discussed ways a person may disclose.

In considering the possible support needs of the participants, we developed varied instructional materials (i.e., large print materials, pictorial representations) to accommodate participants and used universal design for learning (UDL) strategies in leading the sessions (Bremer, Clapper, Hitchcock, Hall, & Kachgal, 2002). Through the creation of youth breakout sessions and the use of UDL, we made FEAT more accessible to the young adults in attendance.

2.4.2. *Training materials*

We provided all participants paper handouts of the presentation, evaluation forms, and family and young

adult activities. We also provided participants with several reference documents to prevent confusion and facilitate understanding (e.g., a glossary of terms). To enhance knowledge translation (Graham et al., 2006), we created a “Steps to Employment” document, which has a short break down of some of the steps to gaining competitive employment, to be used with the Plan for Employment completed by participants at the end of the training. Together, these two documents encouraged and facilitated participants’ turning their knowledge into action following training.

Further, we created a FEAT Web Resources document that included annotated links to state and federal resources relevant to employment, transition, health-care, and family support. We provided an annotation for each website and highlighted key features and suggested uses on the document. We also provided participants with a resource CD containing additional PDF resources on the various FEAT topics as well as an all electronic version of the curricular materials they received at FEAT. We provided a CD to (a) prevent, as one participant put it, “information overload” (Francis, Gross, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 2013), and (b) facilitate technology-assisted access.

2.4.3. Spanish translation and trainings

The rising population of Spanish-speaking families in southwestern Kansas (e.g., 48.6% Hispanic population in Garden City, Kansas in 2010) made translating FEAT trainings and materials a necessity to ensure accessibility. Two native Spanish speakers (one from Puerto Rico and one from Colombia) with graduate degrees in the field of disabilities collaborated to translate the original FEAT documents, training materials, and evaluations into a neutral or universal form of Spanish. They also delivered FEAT in Spanish in areas with high populations of Spanish-speaking families. The southwestern regional office of Families Together, Inc. had two Spanish-speaking staff members whom also supported the implementation of Spanish FEAT events. In 2013, we had Hispanic staff from Families Together, Inc. update these translations and translate additional FEAT materials to ensure wider accessibility.

The translators used online reference tools, current research and literature in Spanish on the topics of special education, employment and disability, and parent-school partnerships, among other topics. In order to maintain a clear and neutral translation (Eremenco, Cella, & Arnold, 2005), they revised for regionalisms and syntax and chose terminology according to their sources and knowledge. Before

presenting FEAT to our participants, FEAT translators reviewed and revised training materials with two second-generation Spanish speakers from the Families Together, Inc. staff to ensure understanding of the terms chosen and that they were interpreted correctly and without difficulty within the proper context. Translations were revised as necessary to ensure understanding across cultures.

Before presenting, the Spanish-speaking trainers introduced themselves, shared some background information (e.g., nationality and their role), and explained the translation process and apologized in advance for any regionalisms, encouraging the participants to speak up if they needed clarification. The presenters built rapport with the participants prior to beginning the trainings. While presenting, the Spanish-speaking trainers often used more than one term to explain a concept and stopped at certain points to ask if anybody had questions or needed information repeated. Our partnership with Families Together, Inc. and their dedication to improving competitive employment for people with ISN, including Spanish-speaking families, were essential to the success of FEAT and its ability to reach this underserved population.

2.5. FEAT partnerships

The implementation of FEAT required the development of partnerships within each training community in Kansas. First, we partnered with the regional PTI office to implement FEAT. Second, we sought out community partners to present at trainings, network with families and help to address their support needs. Third, we partnered with schools for outreach to families and teachers. And, fourth, we partnered with the Kansas Workforce Centers to implement follow-up technical assistance and support participants in accessing that employment resource.

2.5.1. Working with state PTI offices

Staff at the Beach Center on Disability built strong partnerships with Families Together, Inc., Kansas’ Parent Training and Information Center regional offices. This partnership was essential for the management of local area logistics in identifying and securing training locations, advertising and registering training participants, and connecting with local area community representatives to support and participate in the afternoon networking sessions. Families Together staff co-presented the FEAT trainings with Beach Center on Disability staff, helped to gather stories of successfully

employed Kansans to include in the curriculum, and provided follow-up technical assistance to families.

2.5.2. *Getting the support of the community*

Getting the support of local community members in implementing FEAT was important to the success of the networking opportunities built into the afternoon of each training day. Staff at the Beach Center on Disability and Families Together regional offices made connections with area agency, information, and benefits programs to learn about the services they provided, invite them to share with families at FEAT, and to help us identify successfully, competitively employed individuals with disabilities and their families to also come and share their employment story with FEAT participants. By connecting local representatives of agencies and organizations to the families at the training, families are able to make that personal connection which supports taking action to use the resources available. Often representatives brought handouts for participants (e.g., brochures or pamphlets describing their services and programs, applications for services, business cards) to support enhancing their knowledge of the resource and their ability to access it. Localizing FEAT with support from local community members is a key part of FEAT's success.

2.5.3. *Conducting outreach through schools*

In 2013, as a result of participant recommendations for how to improve FEAT, we partnered with area public schools special education services to assist with recruiting both families and teachers to attend FEAT as a team and participate in our research. In this partnership, the schools identified students who met our population description and whom they felt would benefit from FEAT. The schools then sent these families advertisements for the FEAT training and encouraged them to attend. Attending FEAT is free, so schools benefitted from the partnership through free training for any teacher who wanted to attend.

2.5.4. *Providing technical assistance through the workforce centers*

Prior research on FEAT (Francis, Gross, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 2013) indicated that many people who would have benefited from receiving technical assistance support, did not request it. Though most who did receive technical assistance found it to be helpful. In an effort to bolster the retention of knowledge and high expectations and address the support needs of those who did not request it, we added two scheduled, group

technical assistance meetings following FEAT attendance at three and nine months post-training to which FEAT attendees were invited. We partnered with the Kansas Workforce Centers to host the follow-up technical assistance meetings. Doing so creates additional opportunities for networking, provides an opportunity for problem-solving and addressing barriers, and introduces attendees to one of the many employment resources available.

These many partnerships facilitated the development and implementation of an excellent model of training, though some aspects did pose challenges.

3. Challenges of implementing FEAT

Although FEAT developed into an effective program, we experienced some challenges developing and implementing the training. Below we discuss three primary challenges and our responses to them.

3.1. *Recruiting families*

When we first started FEAT in Kansas, there was a lot of enthusiasm and many people signed up. Often we had a wait list. However, there were always several people who registered but did not show up for the training and did not cancel their registration. This resulted in missed opportunities for people on waitlists and wasted expenses on excess food for participants. To try to prevent "no-shows," we instigated a reservation fee of \$20 due at registration and refundable following attendance. This was successful at preventing "no-shows," but also substantially reduced the number of registrants.

During the initial development stages of FEAT (2010–2012), we limited recruitment efforts to the typical means that Families Together used to advertise other trainings (i.e., email list mailings, e-newsletters, postal service mailers, flyers dropped off at schools). To extend our recruitment efforts, in 2013, we added two additional partners: Workforce Centers and schools. The Workforce Centers, like Families Together, also shared information about FEAT trainings through their networks. Additionally, we partnered with school districts in each training region to recruit families to reach those with transition age youth who have not yet sought support through Families Together and would not be in their mailing list.

3.2. *Localizing the training*

One of the unique aspects of FEAT is that we localized the training to each community in which we

delivered it, inviting members from the area community to present during the afternoon of each training day. It was challenging to secure 10-20 community presenters for the training (for Part One and Two combined). The partnership with the state PTI was important because each regional office knew the community in which it was housed. Their network and connections in the local community were important in identifying those service providers who provided supported and customized employment and those models of successful, competitive employment. However, we often needed to make cold calls to local supported employment providers to solicit their support in presenting in the afternoon session of Part 2 and in assisting us to identify models of successful, competitive employment in the local community who can present in the afternoon of Part 1. We also found that (a) offering presenters lunch, (b) offering families and individuals with disabilities who present during Part One about their employment a small financial incentive (\$30) for their time, and (c) holding Part Two on a Friday (a workday for most providers) mitigated many barriers.

3.3. Providing technical assistance

Providing technical assistance in different communities was challenging because each community presented with different barriers to employment. Some barriers were availability based (whether a desired service was available in their community) while others were systemic (e.g., the Vocational Rehabilitation counselor said their child was unemployable or offered sheltered work instead of competitive). Further, although we offered free, individualized support to participants, fewer than half utilized this support (Francis et al., 2014). Our research on barriers to employment indicated that there might have been families who would have benefited from technical assistance who did not request it (Francis et al., 2014). This underuse of available technical assistance may be due to several reasons including (a) a reluctance to ask for help, (b) "life" getting in the way, (c) a desire for a more face-to-face, hands-on interaction, or (d) a need for the social support associated with a group setting. As a result, we scheduled group technical assistance meetings in local communities to increase use among participants.

4. Discussion

High expectations for employment (Carter et al., 2011; Timmons et al., 2011) and knowledge and use of

employment resources (Dutta et al., 2008) play an influential role in the post-secondary employment outcomes of young adults with ISN. Short- and intermediate-term research on FEAT indicates that attending FEAT is influential in increasing expectations, knowledge, steps toward employment, and competitive employment outcomes. This description of FEAT and its evolutionary process, including integration of best practices and participant feedback allows readers to understand why FEAT is effective. The information we provided also allows readers to (a) design a family-focused intervention grounded in the effective elements used in FEAT, (b) align existing efforts with the effective methods used in FEAT, and (c) avoid or address the challenges we experienced in its development and implementation.

4.1. Future directions

Consistent with the iterative development of FEAT, the FEAT team is continually reevaluating the training to ensure that the curriculum includes the most recent and relevant information and that the training addresses the needs of families and individuals seeking competitive employment. For example, we are currently considering how to facilitate parent-to-parent support groups or communities of practice as sustainable methods to decrease barriers and increase competitive employment outcomes. We are also continuing to evaluate the effectiveness of FEAT through surveys and interviews with attendees and non-attendees pre-training, and at one week and one-year post-training as a part of our work funded by NIDRR.

We are also considering alternative directions for FEAT, including modifying the training to be used for professional development for schools, agencies, or programs. This is a logical next step for FEAT because professionals from schools, agencies, and programs often harbor low expectations for competitive employment and are under or misinformed about employment resources (National Disability Rights Network, 2011; Timmons et al., 2011). Providing complementary professional development training would help increase expectations and knowledge among professionals, which may result in shared goals and united efforts toward competitive employment. Further, many families who attended expressed a need for a FEAT-like training that addresses community living. Future development and research will include using the FEAT training model and adapting it to provide family-focused trainings in other realms of adult living

(e.g., housing/independent living, community participation, participant direction).

Finally, FEAT has proven successful in Kansas. One aspect of FEAT that distinguishes it from other knowledge-based trainings on employment is that its content is localized, not only to Kansas but also to the unique communities in which it was conducted. To expand FEAT into new states will require modifying the curriculum to reflect each state's, and the communities' within it, available resources. A future direction for FEAT is to expand the training to other states to determine (a) how easily the program can be contextualized to a new state with various employment-related laws, programs, and agencies; and (b) how effective it is with larger and more diverse populations.

4.2. Conclusion

FEAT is a family-focused intervention developed with iterative feedback from participants that has shown promising results in Kansas. The purpose of this article was to provide information about FEAT, the process for developing FEAT, and the future of FEAT. We hope that this information facilitates individuals interested in increasing competitive employment to design a family-focused training, enhance existing efforts, and avoid or address challenges associated with developing and implementing a state-wide family-focused training.

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