

Ukuwela: The impact of a school-based supported employment program for learners with disabilities in George, South Africa

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Rationale: The Carpe Diem School, based in George, South Africa, accommodates learners with special educational needs. Learners acquire a variety of work related skills, yet, various reasons contribute to low levels of employment amongst school leavers, who are thus dependent on Disability Grants. The Ukuwela Program was initiated to bridge the gap between school and the world of work and is rooted in the model of supported employment (SE).

Objectives: The presentation outlines the values, principles and components of SE in the context of the Ukuwela program. The nature of job support provided to learners during skills development placements in the open labour market are described. Experiences of employers who provided placements were explored.

Method: This qualitative enquiry makes use of collective case study design. Semi-structured interviews were utilised to explore the experiences of learners and employers. Data was analysed inductively with themes emerging from within-case analysis and cross-case analysis.

Results: Findings indicate that the job coach is key to accessing job opportunities. The nature of job support provided is related to learners' socio-economic context and their disability. SE emerged as an effective strategy to address existing disability stereotypes. Factors determining employment in the open labour market reflects on the economic climate and local business needs.

Conclusion: This study highlights the positive impact of a SE program in Education in the South African

Government context and could serve as an effective alternative to traditional school-to-work programs in low to middle income countries.