

Securing Employment and Economic Keys to Stability (SEEKS) Final Evaluation Report Five Page Executive Summary

Prepared for the SEEKS Leadership Team

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Overview

The goal of the SEEKS research project is to increase employment for adults (ages 18-60 years of age) with disabilities who were likely eligible for SSI/SSDI and received services from a Center for Independent Living (CIL) or certified vendor, increase gross income, and/or reduce social isolation.

To meet this goal, a new service delivery method as part of a randomized controlled trial (RCT) study.

- Two-thirds of the participants were randomly assigned to work with a team of providers who were trained to deliver SOAR (SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery) application assistance, Customized Employment (CE), Individual Placement and Supports (IPS), and certified in Benefits Planning as Work Incentives Planning - Credential (WIP-C) concurrently and remind the participant that they had access to all these services.
- The other participants were offered business as usual through their local Center for Independent Living which could assist them with – or connect them to services in their community to assist them with -applying for SSI/SSDI, seeking employment, and/or benefits planning; this was the Control Group.



Figure 1. Roles in Service Delivery Team

Data was gathered in two ways.

- Participants in the study met with a Peer Data Collector at baseline and then ideally within six months, 12 months, and 18 months after they joined the study.
- Interviews were conducted with 12 Treatment Group participants.

Findings

Demographics Overview



- 51% Female, 43% Male, 6% Non-Binary
- 80% Single
- Average age 40 years when joined SEEKS
- 86% reported less than 4 years of college as highest education
- For the most part Race/Ethnicity matches Colorado Demographics
 - 68% of Control and 58% of Treatment group White
 - Differ from Colorado demographics in that a higher percentage of SEEKS participants identified as multiple races, and a lower percentage identified as Hispanic
- Most Frequently reported Primary Disability Types
 - 43% of the Treatment and Control reported Physical Disability
 - 36% of the Treatment and 28% of the Control reported Mental Emotional Disability

Comparison of the Treatment and Control Groups Overview



- The groups are the same in age, gender, race/ethnicity.
- The groups **DIFFER in Primary Disability at follow-up 1 and 2** which may result in differences in employment outcomes.
 - a statistically higher percentage of persons who identified as having a mental/emotional disability in the Treatment Group than the control group at follow-up 1 and 2.
 - There are also statistically more persons who identify as having a physical disability in the control group than in the Treatment Group at follow-up 2
- The groups **DIFFER in marital status at follow-up 3** which could impact total household income.
 - The Control Group has a statistically higher percentage of married participants than the Treatment Group.

Overall, the groups are the same so any difference in outcomes is most likely due to the intervention.

Connection to Social Security Benefits Overview



- The groups did not statistically significantly differ in the percentage who applied for SSI/SSDI.
 - Around 75% in each group applied.
- The groups did not statistically significantly differ in the percentage who were approved for SSI/SSDI.
 - 16% of Control participants were approved.
 - 14% of Treatment participants were approved.

Employment Overview



- There is no difference in employment between the groups at any time point in the study
 - At highest point 27.7% of the Control and 26.3% of the Treatment participants reported being employed during a follow-up interview. **This is higher than the 22.7% national employment-population ratio for people with disabilities in 2024.**
- 87% of SEEKS participants had job experience prior to SEEKS.
- Both groups saw an increase in the percent connected to DVR at each follow-up data collection time point. Qualitative participants reported this connection was helpful.
- Most participants reported having 1 job.
- The majority of the participants working loved their jobs.
- The majority did not use job supports.
- The Treatment Group did statistically significantly report more job supports in follow-up 2 than the Control (an average of .46 vs. 0)



Income from Employment (SGA) Overview

There was no significant difference in the percentages of Treatment and Control Above or Below Substantial Gainful Activity at any time point.

Income Overview



- The groups did not differ in mean annual income at any data point.
 - The mean annual income did increase for the Treatment Group at each data collection point throughout the study, however.
- When we compared those in Treatment Group who worked with the CIL SEEKS Intervention team to those who worked with the Certified Vendor (CV) Intervention team, there was no significant difference in mean annual income.
 - The mean annual income did increase for the Treatment Group who worked with the CV SEEKS Intervention Team at each data collection point throughout the study, however.
- There was no difference between the Treatment and Control Group in Income Satisfaction. People in both groups did end more satisfied with their income which could reflect change in economy.
- Participants identified expenses and income sources that were not captured by our data but that should be considered for future studies.

Talk to a Benefits Planner Overview



- Rather than compare across time points, decided to shift to an unduplicated count and focuses on the question - “Did you meet with a Benefits Planner during your time in SEEKS”
 - There was a statistically significant difference. A higher percentage of the Treatment Group reported they met with a Benefits Planner during their time in the SEEKS study.
- For those who met with a Benefits Planner
 - There was no difference between the two groups in the percentage who reported receiving a Benefits Summary and Analysis.
 - The majority in both groups were motivated to get a job based on their conversation with the Benefits Planner. The Treatment Group had a statistically significantly higher percentage who were motivated.
 - 55.6% of the Control Group
 - 84.1% of the Treatment Group

The higher percentage may be due to the ongoing relationship with the Treatment Group participants or the training the SEEKS Benefit Planners had. Future research should investigate this more.

Social Connection Overview



- The groups did not differ in Overall Social Connection, Satisfaction with Connection, Community Activities, or Online Communities.
- With regard to Peer Support Groups, the Control Group reported a significantly higher mean score than the Treatment Group at follow-up three.
- Participants reported COVID had little impact on their connection scores.
- Some qualitative respondents shared they were not in a space to work on social connections
- One likely explanation for the overall low connection scores and the lack of difference in connection scores groups is that our measures did not capture meaningful social connection items for our participants and/or items that would be impacted by our intervention.
- Some qualitative respondents reported that that interacting with the SEEKS Intervention Team and being asked about social connections encouraged them to work on their social connections.

Future Directions and Lessons Learned

Future Directions and Lessons Learned Overview



- The SEEKS Model shows promise
 - It is worth testing the Certified Vendor SEEKS Intervention model further
 - Future research looking at employment for persons with disabilities as a desired outcomes should look more into DVR.
 - Future research should look more into the DVR benefits planning model.
- Research Specific Recommendations
 - We recommend calling participants who did not cash their checks, having the same person call for follow-up data calls, and sending out emails or texts prior to a follow-up data call to increase retention rate
 - Important to measure social connection. Consider including measures around social network for career goals.
 - Capture costs around disability needs and self-employment.
 - Capture income sources like unemployment insurance and financial support from family.

It is our hope SEEKS is only the beginning and we can continue to figure out what works best to support persons with disabilities as they seek to build they life want while keeping the benefits they need. We end with a quote from one of our Treatment Group participants - *"I really, really appreciate you guys and the program and I wish the Independent Center still had it or I would do it again."*



If you are interested in the full SEEKS final report, please reach out to Yvonne.Kellar-Guenther@CPHInnovation.org



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