



# Florida Center for INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

## Discovery: Discovering Your Personal Genius

Everyone has been evaluated at some point. It may have been an evaluation related to health, academics, or employment skills. Do you remember how the evaluation process made you feel? Were you nervous or uncomfortable? Did you leave wondering if the results of the evaluation reflect the “real” you?

Individuals with developmental disabilities face significant challenges when it comes to the accuracy and usefulness of typical evaluations and assessments. Some evaluations may be standardized checklists. Others are “situational assessments” where situations are usually made-up and not related to the individual’s strengths and interests. Often, evaluation professionals have a very limited time frame to get to know a person and create an opinion (such as: is this individual able to work?). For the most part these evaluations do not answer the question, “Who is this individual?”

“Discovering Your Personal Genius,” also known as “Discovery,” is a person centered planning process that involves getting to know a person before helping them plan (Callahan, 2001). Discovery begins with a team coming together to discover and gather information about an individual’s:

1. Interests, skills, preferred environments and activities: When they are at their best?
2. Current skills and levels of performance
3. Effective strategies, ideal working conditions also including those environments and strategies that should be avoided.

The information gathered is incorporated into a Vocational/Personal Profile. The profile is a tool that can be used for: IEP planning; organizing a customized employment experience; paid employment; and life activities and experiences. Customized employment is based on a match between the unique strengths, needs, and interests of the job candidate with a disability, and the identified business needs of an employer or the self-employment business chosen by the candidate.

### What Works?

#### A Team Effort

*Some of the elements needed to make the Discovery process successful include:*

- ◇ A dedicated team, who believes in the individual; and believes that everyone is able to work, regardless of the challenges they may face.
- ◇ At least 90% of information being gathered comes from natural, inclusive setting and a variety of environments.
- ◇ Being careful not to jump quickly into employment planning. Just because someone shows an interest in an area, does not necessarily mean that they want to be working in that field—allow time to truly Discover!
- ◇ A team working from a capacity vs. deficit viewpoint. Many evaluations determine what an individual can’t do. Discovery looks at strengths and what a person can do.

- ◇ Brainstorming, brainstorming, and more brainstorming! For example, brainstorming locations to explore an interest, or brainstorming possible employers in the area.
- ◇ Going with the flow of letting the individual lead the process.

### Example:

The team may plan to have someone go with Jane to a favorite book store because she loves books, but on the way Jane is pulling you to go into a nail salon. When something like this happens you have to go for it! It's important to find out what Jane likes about the nail salon and what grabs her attention. It will help the team because this is valuable information about Jane's interests, communication, social skills, support needs, etc.

### Benefits of Discovery

- ◇ New found interests and skills of focus individuals. Even family members are surprised when an individual's intense interest is not the area where they want to work.
- ◇ Overturning decisions of "unemployable" from Vocational Rehabilitation. VR accepts the Vocational/Personal Profile.
- ◇ Team member perspectives change. They see the unique skills, preferences, and support needs, and possibilities for an individual, first.
- ◇ Agency representatives (i.e. Agency for Persons with Disabilities, VR, provider agencies, and school personnel) on teams become more familiar with the individual and with each other. As a result the team members develop a bond while working together.
- ◇ Individual Education Plans (IEP) are modified based on new information including: learning strategies that work and training opportunities that lead to the individual's desired employment outcome.

### Example:

A mom, who initially thought her daughter could not be employed, discovered that her daughter could create her own business, with the proper supports in place.

## FCIC Related Projects

- ◇ Partners in Transition Training and Technical Assistance Project [www.partnersintransition.org](http://www.partnersintransition.org)
- ◇ Student's Website on Employment & Transition: [www.fyitransition.com](http://www.fyitransition.com)
- ◇ Supported, Integrated, Employment, Team Training Project.
- ◇ Micro enterprise Training and Technical Assistance Project.
- ◇ Self-Employment for Adults and Youth with Disabilities: Start-Up/Florida [www.start-up-usa.biz](http://www.start-up-usa.biz)
- ◇ Center on Self-Employment

## Resources

- ◇ *Steps to Discovery*, University of Montana's Rural Institute website: <http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition/Discovery.asp>
- ◇ *Discovery Is... Vignette's on the Discovery Process* (Edited by Michael Callahan of Marc Gold and Associates, 2001)
- ◇ Griffin, C., Hammis, D. *Making Self-Employment Work for People with Disabilities*. Baltimore, Maryland: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc.