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TRANSITION OF DISABLED YOUTH FROM  
SCHOOL TO WORKING LIFE  
THE GENOA EXPERIENCE

ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT  
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During the past six years, the transition from school to adult and working life of young people with disabilities has been the focus of a major study by OECD's Centre for Educational Research and Innovation. One of the major conclusions of this study is that the success of "transition" efforts for young persons with developmental disabilities is greatly enhanced by the use of flexible education and training programmes which stress the development of social skills during elementary and secondary education and the teaching of "generic" work skills through an individualised work preparation and work "internship" approach. One unique approach of this type was identified in Genoa, in Northern Italy.

Within Genoa an innovative system has been developed to maximise the potential of young adults with moderate and severe disabilities to transition from school to adult and working life. This system relies upon integrative educational models and a multidisciplinary support network and uses "special transition teams" to assist young persons with disabilities from age 16 on. Heavily relying on the active participation of employers, unions and co-workers, this system uses direct work evaluations to fashion an individualised, multi-year programme for each disabled participant to "transition" from school to gainful employment and community life. •

This description profile is based on information provided to OECD by the Italian Ministry of Education and by the regional and municipal authorities in Genoa. It is also based on extensive information collected through two on-site visits to Genoa in December 1987 and October 1988. These field visits included both on-site observation of service provision in Genoa and interviews with young persons with developmental disabilities, employers, co-workers and staff of the educational agencies of both Liguria and Genoa and of various local health and social service units.

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The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the OECD or the national authority concerned.

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## PART I. BACKGROUND

Prior to the initiation of the Genoa transition approach, young persons with moderate and severe disabilities completing public compulsory school programmes were faced with both immediate and long-term obstacles to successful transition from school to gainful employment and independent community life, including the absence of any meaningful upper secondary vocational options and a total lack of co-operation among the various agencies responsible for providing educational, social and employment support.

A key problem frustrating successful transition for young people with moderate and severe disabilities to competitive employment and independent community living which soon emerged was the absence of needed social and work skills and competencies. Experience demonstrated that while many young persons with disabilities could master specific job skills they lacked the proper psycho-social preparation for the demands of the work environment (e.g., the rules of the workplace, the social contact with supervisors and fellow employees). It became readily apparent that an important factor leading to the failure of individuals to develop these needed "work skills" was the lack of practical experience, i.e., actual exposure to the workplace.

Most of the problems encountered by young persons with disabilities in linking competitive employment and independent living may be attributed to the lack of effective service co-ordination among the responsible public agencies. Even when the supply of job opportunities increased, employment prospects for young persons with moderate and severe disabilities did not keep pace. The important missing ingredient was a mechanism for ensuring intensive co-operation among health and rehabilitation staff, employers and students and their families to plan and ensure successful transition.

### OVERVIEW OF THE ITALIAN-GENOA SYSTEM

Social policy in Italy establishes a basic obligation on the part of government (national, regional and local) to provide whatever health care and social support is needed by families and individuals unable to participate successfully in the mainstream social and economic systems of the country.

#### The Italian health care programme

The regional administration of the Italian Ministry of Health and Social Services is generally responsible for employment and rehabilitation provisions for disabled people and all health and social services delivered by the local health authorities within Genoa.

#### Services to children and youth with disabilities

All non-residential health and social services for children and young persons in Genoa under the age of 18 are under the supervision of the Maternal and Child Health Service ("MCH unit") of the local health agency serving the catchment area in which the child resides. Within each MCH unit services are provided to children and youth with disabilities through three principal

subunits: a) the regular paediatric medical staff; b) a special paediatric support team, and c) special rehabilitation institutes, financially supported by the unit. The services provided by the regular paediatric staff for children with disabilities are identical to those provided to all other children. These services include preventive health care, diagnosis and treatment. The services provided by each of the other MCH-subunits are focused on the provision of special health and social support to children and youth with disabilities and their families.

{Special paediatric support teams}

Within each MCH unit a special paediatric support team has been established in order to co-ordinate the provision of health and social services to approximately 250 children and young persons under the age of 18 who have been identified as disabled. Each paediatric support team consists of a supervisor (a psychiatrist), three educational specialists, two clinical psychologists and two speech therapists. The after-school teacher, although not a regular employee of the MCH-unit, functions as a de facto member of the paediatric support team during the periods of pre-school and compulsory school enrolment.

The paediatric support team provides services to children in paediatric day care and most children of pre-school or school age with disabilities receive "related services" through their local team. Within a school population, determinations as to which children are disabled (and thus which children are entitled to "special education services") are made by the local paediatric support team.

{Special rehabilitation institutes}

Special rehabilitation institutes in Genoa, operating under contract to one or more MCH units, provide comprehensive "related services" to children with disabilities in each of the following categories: a) children with moderate or severe mental retardation (including virtually all children with Down Syndrome); b) children who are blind and deaf-blind; and c) children who are non-ambulatory. Each of these special institutes is operated by a parents association. Services offered at the institutes include speech therapy, occupational and physical therapy, psychological services, recreation, social work services, school health services, parent training and transportation.

#### ITALIAN-GENOVESE DISABILITY POLICY

Elementary and secondary education in Italy is under the supervision of the national Ministry of Education. Education and transition policy regarding persons with developmental disabilities in Genoa is centred on three main principles:

- integration;
- multi-disciplinary support and
- community participation.

## Integration

Within the city of Genoa, the principle of "integration" has been pursued both in the process of education and in the formulation of its ultimate goals. Virtually all children with disabilities are enrolled in regular compulsory schools and are assigned to regular classroom settings. Students with even the severest disabilities are included in the age-appropriate peer groups, and the compulsory school curriculum emphasizes the development of social and communication skills. Integrated gainful employment and independent adult life within the community have been established as the primary outcome goals for the Genoa project. Within the project, work evaluation and work experience strategies are used which focus on regular integrated employment settings rather than sheltered work.

## Multi-disciplinary support

The principle of "multi-disciplinary" support stresses the importance of involving persons drawn from a wide range of disciplines in different aspects of the transition process. In Genoa, psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, special support teachers and regular educators all play important roles in the education/transition process. One important aspect of this multi-disciplinary process is the expansive role played by local health agencies. Indeed, the success of the Genoa approach is due in large part to the work of talented professionals drawn from many disciplines who are committed to the goals of social and economic integration for all persons with disabilities.

## Community participation

The principle of "community participation" requires that all sectors of the community be actively involved in the overall "transition process". In addition to this broad concept of organisational participation, the principle of community participation also anticipates that peers, co-workers and family members will play an active role in the transition process as primary support providers.

## PRE-SCHOOL AND COMPULSORY SCHOOL PROGRAMMES

### Pre-school

In Genoa, public pre-school educational programmes are operated on a voluntary enrolment basis for all children aged 3 to 6. In contrast, education for all children between the ages of 6 and 15 is mandatory.

Public pre-school education is provided free of charge to all children. Special transportation to and from the pre-school is also provided whenever public transportation systems are unavailable. The public pre-school programme stresses social development, creativity and co-operative activities rather than academic development. Average pre-school class size is approximately 12, and open classroom structures are used to promote social interaction among all pre-school children in the same age groups.

Between 3 and 5 per cent of the children enrolled in public pre-school programmes are identified as disabled. Children with disabilities enrolled in public pre-school programmes are assigned to regular, age-appropriate classes, and no more than two children with disabilities may be enrolled in any one classroom grouping.

#### Compulsory schools

In Italy, all children aged 6 to 15 must attend a public or private school programme. The vast majority of parents in Genoa (over 95 per cent) choose to enrol their children in the public compulsory schools. In Italy, compulsory public education is separated into two sequential comprehensive school programmes -- "elementary" and "middle" schools. Elementary schools enrol children between the ages of 6 and 11; middle schools enrol children between the ages of 11 and 14. Italian "high schools", which enrol children aged 15 to 19, are not compulsory.

#### School enrolment

In Genoa approximately 31 000 pupils are currently enrolled in public elementary school programmes (ages 6-11) and 28 000 in public middle school programmes (ages 11-15). National laws passed in Italy in 1971 and 1977 clearly mandate the integration of all disabled children in both regular elementary and middle schools (1971) and within heterogeneous classrooms (1977). As a result, "special education" does not exist as a "place" or series of places within Genoa but as a constellation of support services provided to some children within the regular education system.

### SPECIAL EDUCATION

In Genoa, children of school age who are identified as disabled receive both special instructional services and, as appropriate, a variety of developmental, corrective and supportive services. Special education services are virtually always provided in the least restrictive classroom environment.

#### Eligibility for special education

As a result of this definition of "special education", the number of percentage of children identified as "disabled" within the Italian schools is surprisingly low (approximately 2 per cent of all students). This national trend is well reflected in Genoa, where, in 1988, only 520 (or less than 2 per cent) of the children enrolled in elementary schools were identified as "disabled", and 776 children (or 2.5 per cent) of the children enrolled in middle schools were so identified.

#### The regular classroom

Elementary and middle school education in Genoa is provided, for the most part, in self-contained settings where the teacher/pupil ratio is not permitted by national law to exceed 1:20. The regular classroom placements of all students with disabilities (including those with "severe intellectual disabilities") are age-appropriate and in natural proportion to the overall composition of the school population. Children with disabilities are randomly

distributed among all classrooms and no classroom may have more than two disabled students on the class roll at the same time. In the autumn of 1988 fewer than 20 children with disabilities (1.5 per cent of all children with disabilities) were assigned to separate classroom settings. In most cases, these children (all very severely disabled) were "transitioning" to regular classroom-based programmes. The curriculum utilised within the regular classroom structure places great emphasis on socialisation and social skills development.

#### SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

"Special education" for all disabled children in Genoa is provided by regular classroom teachers, by support teachers who are employed by and work within the compulsory schools and by special "after-school teachers" who are employed by the city of Genoa upon the request of the local health agency. In some instances, students with disabilities may also be provided an extra year of compulsory schooling during middle school (ages 11-16).

##### Support teachers

The primary student "caseload" for a support teacher ranges from one to four students based on an assessment of the severity (not the type) of the student's disability. Support teachers are organised into four general areas of specialisation:

- Mental handicaps;
- Learning and behavioural handicaps;
- Deaf;
- Blind.

One of the most striking features of compulsory education programmes in Genoa is the high degree of social acceptance at all ages among non-disabled peers. Repeated observation of activities in the compulsory school both inside and outside the classroom reveals very few instances of social "differentiation" or rejection of disabled students by their non-disabled peers.

##### After-school teachers

The after-school teacher, consistent with the child's educational plan, provides special one-to-one instruction, usually in the child's home. The curriculum for after-school teaching is closely co-ordinated with the regular classroom curriculum through frequent consultations between the child's support teacher and after-school teacher.

#### PREPARATION FOR TRANSITION

During their final year of public middle school, all students (including all students with disabilities) and their families participate in a three-pronged "transition" programme which involves special classroom instruction focused on various transition issues, site visits to various upper

secondary and employment options, and individualised transition counselling provided to students and their parents.

Individualised transition counselling is provided by a special "regional transition team". These regional teams, which are voluntary, are composed of regular and support teachers from various school sites within a particular region of the city. They meet with students and their families to discuss both academic and vocational interests and aptitudes. Based on these discussions, team members work to identify specific placement opportunities for each student who will be leaving the compulsory school programme. These placement options include both further academic training, direct employment approaches (e.g. apprenticeship), a range of vocational training options (e.g. post-secondary vocational school; the Genoa project) and sheltered workshops.

#### UPPER SECONDARY PROGRAMMES

Students with disabilities leaving compulsory schools in Genoa at age 15 or 16 have a choice of four different paths leading to employment: a) the academic path; b) the vocational path; c) the sheltered path; or d) the Genoa project.

##### The academic path

Students successfully completing public middle schools in Genoa may elect to enrol in one or more of the public high schools operating within the city. Successful completion of the high school programme, in turn, permits students to enter universities and, thereafter, the various fields of employment requiring graduate and undergraduate education. Traditionally only a few students with disabilities (usually physical) were, in fact, permitted to enrol in high schools in Genoa. Significant progress has been made in increasing the numbers of physically disabled and mildly mentally disabled young persons who are now enrolling in high school programmes.

##### The vocational path

Disabled students who graduate from middle school programmes in Genoa may elect to enrol in upper secondary vocational programmes of three basic types:

- work experience programmes;
- integrated vocational training programmes; and
- special training workshops.

In addition to these vocational programmes, the Italian Parliament in 1968 created an "employment quota" programme which requires employers to ensure that at least 10 per cent of all employees are persons who are either members of certain disability categories or from other priority groups (e.g. widowers, orphans) within the general labour force. This special, nationwide "quota" hiring law contributes significantly to the interest of employers in recruiting young persons with certain types of disabilities (i.e. physical and sensory) who complete vocational and technical training.

### {Work experience programmes}

The local Ministry of Labour in Genoa has developed and operated an innovative summer work experience programme for students with disabilities who have graduated from the public compulsory school system. Most of the work opportunities within the programme are agricultural. Students are given lodging and board by farm families who also provide on-the-job training and monitor performance on a wide variety of agricultural work tasks. Families are paid a modest sum by the Ministry to participate in the programme.

The work experience programme operates for an eight- to twelve-week period. In most instances, the young persons with disabilities receive a direct stipend from the Ministry. The programme has proven particularly effective in assisting young persons with disabilities develop independent living skills.

### {Integrated vocational training}

Ordinary vocational training is provided to both disabled and non-disabled students in publicly operated vocational and technical schools. These schools offer two to three years of specialised training in a wide range of commercial and industrial areas. Vocational instruction is provided through a combination of classroom-based and on-the-job training, conducted in a variety of regular (i.e. integrated) employment settings. Academic instruction is not routinely provided within vocational and technical school programmes. Most students with disabilities participating in ordinary vocational training enter the competitive workforce at the completion of the programme.

### {Special training workshops}

Students between the ages of 15 and 17 with severe social and/or behavioural problems (including both disabled and non-disabled students) may also enrol in a special "partially sheltered" vocational training programme upon completion of middle school. This programme is supported in part by the Ministry of Health and Social Services and by a special grant from the European Community.

The twin goals of the special training workshops are the development of social skills (how to get along with teachers and co-workers) and work skills (how to use tools, how to carry out work assignments) rather than the acquisition of specific job skills. Four workshops are operated by the local health agency within Genoa in different parts of the city. Young people with mild and moderate disabilities are distributed among the workshops in "natural proportion". Young persons with severe disabilities are assigned to only one of the workshops.

The special training workshop programme consists of three phases. During the first, both work skill preparation and academic instruction are provided to small groups of students who are assigned to a two-person training team. Following the completion of the initial training phase, students are assigned to a specific work activity within the workshop on a full-time basis. Work performed within the workshop is supervised by a work training instructor, and students are paid a small stipend for the work performed during this phase of the programme. The first two phases last between six months and two years.

Upon completion of the work activity phase, students are placed in a series of short-term apprenticeships. During these apprenticeships, the employer pays the student 25 per cent of the regular wage and the local health agency contributes 75 per cent. In most instances, during one of the apprenticeship "rotation" workshops, students are offered permanent, full-time, competitive employment.

#### Sheltered workshops

Five sheltered workshops are currently operated in Genoa by the National Family Association ("ANFFAS"), an association comprised primarily of the parents of disabled children. These workshops provide sheltered employment for 150 young adults with disabilities, most of whom entered the workshops upon completion of middle school.

Each sheltered workshop provides individualised vocational training for newly enrolled employees. The length of training ranges from two weeks to several months, depending on the entry level work and job skills of the individual. Because of the emphasis on social skill development in the compulsory school programme, most enrollees now entering the sheltered workshops have good social and communication skills.

Staff of the sheltered workshops in Genoa report that a substantial number of the persons completing the vocational training offered by the workshops are capable of entering the Genoa Project (described in detail below) or pursuing one or more of the options within the vocational path. At present, because of limited programme capacity, only a few of these persons are actually able to "transfer" to another programme. The vast majority have been placed on "waiting lists" and continue to be employed at the workshops during the "waiting" period. The regional administration of the Ministry of Health and Social Services finances 100 per cent of the cost of sheltered workshop services provided by ANFFAS.

## PART II. THE GENOA PROJECT

The Genoa Project is a multi-faceted programme serving 250 mentally disabled young persons in Genoa, including young persons both with "moderate" and severe mental retardation and with chronic psychological disabilities (e.g. autism, schizophrenia). It is a special project operated on a city-wide basis which provides comprehensive transition assistance to young persons between the ages of 16 and 24. The project, which "intercepts" young people who would otherwise be assigned to long-term sheltered workshops has, from its inception, been under the supervision of Dr. Enrico Montobbio, a psychiatrist who has dedicated his career to the economic and social integration of people with developmental disabilities. Dr. Montobbio also serves as the transition co-ordinator for all the local health agencies operating within the city.

#### Overview

The central goal of the Genoa Project is to prepare, place and sustain young persons with moderate and severe mental disabilities in integrated and compensated employment. The Genoa Project believes that the opportunity to

engage in work in fully integrated circumstances is essential to the cognitive and emotional development of the individual participants. To this end, the project uses a series of multi-disciplinary professional teams to assess, train and support the employment of disabled participants. Particular emphasis is placed on the thorough preparation of each disabled person for work responsibilities, careful selection of an initial, "probationary" job, and intensive ongoing attention to the psycho-social dimensions of the proposed working environment, particularly with respect to the attitudes and potential of co-workers.

The Genoa Project has established and maintained a series of crucial linkages among public agencies, unions, employers and the families of disabled participants. The project relies on co-workers rather than professional staff to provide job skill (as distinguished from "work skill") training and believes that employer participation in and support for the project will only be assured if employers directly experience the project's success.

The Genoa Project begins with the selection of young persons with moderate and severe mental disabilities for project participation. Following the completion of an individualised intake assessment and a lengthy, individualised work evaluation and training effort, a determination is made by the special transition team (in consultation with the participant and his or her family) whether the participant is able to enter a one-year trial work period leading to sustained, competitive and integrated employment in the private sector. Approximately 80 per cent of those participants completing the intake assessment and work evaluation and training phases of the project enter the private sector strategy.

For those participants determined by the special transition team to be unable to pursue successfully the private sector strategy, half, or 10 per cent, are referred by the Genoa Project to sheltered workshops and the remaining 10 per cent enter the Genoa Project's public sector strategy.

The public sector strategy provides sustained, compensated and integrated employment in public agencies and the project's short-term objective, with transfer to the private sector strategy as a long-term goal.

For the vast majority of project participants (80 per cent) who pursue the private sector strategy, special transition team members devote substantial effort to match the participant (and his or her social and work skill capabilities) with an appropriate job. Once this has been accomplished, the participant (and his or her family), the employer and the Genoa Project enter into a one-year "trial work" contract. Under this contract, the Genoa Project fully reimburses the employer for the participant's wages (through a "special grant" programme) and the employer agrees to subsidise the job training and support activities of co-workers. At the end of the contract period, the employer decides whether to employ the participant on a permanent basis. If an employment decision is made, the Genoa Project will continue to provide employment support through the field action group (in concert with fellow employees) and the employer will assume full responsibility for the salary and benefits paid to the project participant. If the employer decides not to employ the participant on a permanent basis, the special transition team will reassess the situation and negotiate a "trial work" contract with another employer.

The extraordinary success of the Genoa Project is also readily apparent upon direct contact with the young persons who have formed the client population of the programme. In terms of several important indicators of programme success (e.g. type of work being performed, compensation and other benefits, social integration within the work environment, personal independence, personal and social behaviour and self-reported information concerning living and recreational domains), the young people served by the Genoa Project have experienced a degree of overall success significantly higher than that reported or observed in virtually all American transition programmes addressed to a similar client population.

To date, employers have decided permanently to employ 90 per cent of the over 220 project participants who have completed the trial work or "contract" period and over 90 per cent of the young persons with disabilities entering the Genoa Project have succeeded in attaining ongoing, compensated and integrated employment in either the private or the public sector.

#### Project philosophy

The principal goal of the Genoa Project is the successful integration of disabled workers in open employment, the "right place for the right person". The central philosophy underlying the project is that young persons with mental disabilities should be placed in "regular" (integrated) rather than "sheltered" (isolated) employment settings, wherever possible. This philosophy is based on four important premises: a) work stimulates a strong motivation towards adult status; b) a working setting does not have the infantile characteristics of the school and the sheltered workshop; c) open employment is concerned with the exercise of a real status which is carried out according to operative necessities; and, thus d) work in open employment is a fundamental step for mentally disabled people to acquire a social "positional" role rather than to maintain an infantile, "personal" one.

In light of this central project philosophy and based on an analysis of earlier, unsuccessful attempts to maintain persons with disabilities in the competitive work environment, the project design focuses on

- the use of an extensive work evaluation and training process to identify and develop "social skills" and "work skills" (as distinguished from specific job skills) crucial to employment success;
- the use of co-workers to provide initial "job training" and ongoing support to project participants; and
- the creation of an ongoing "mediating" role for the project between the work of moderately and severely disabled young persons and their families on the one hand, and the ordinary world of work on the other.....

{The importance of integrated employment}

The conclusion that integration in a normal (rather than sheltered) workplace must be an essential ingredient of any successful transition approach is based on a careful examination of the role which "work" plays in attaining

full "adult status". Employment in a regular setting ascribes an important role to the disabled person, perhaps the first social role in his/her life, the role of "productive worker". Experience has demonstrated that the assumption of this role (and all of the responsibilities attendant to it) by the disabled individual, in turn, promotes positive psycho-social development, particularly in terms of the establishment of an internal and external "adult identity".

The Genoa Project believes that employment within sheltered, institutionalised settings does not provide the same benefit to the individual because the "sheltered worker" role is not one involving real work. In contrast to regular or open employment, "sheltered workers" are often exempted from the same social rules, duties and responsibilities applicable to other workers. Sheltered workshops are also seen as encouraging habitual infantile behaviour because the personnel are there "for" the benefit of the disabled person, thereby distorting the normal working relationships "with" colleagues. These profound differences between regular and sheltered employment are directly felt by individuals with disabilities. The sheltered experience often actually impedes rather than advances the process of personal maturity and identity.

Experience in Genoa has shown that the best setting for integration from the point of acquiring adult status (positional role) and promoting mature relationships is the large factory.

{Focus on social and "work" skills}

Research undertaken by the Genoa Project reveals that social and social-psychological factors rather than technical skill levels have contributed the most historically to unsuccessful attempts to integrate persons with moderate and severe disabilities into the regular working environment. Research results, for example, indicate that while co-workers tend to have a very high tolerance for problems encountered by a disabled worker related to slow comprehension of work, these same co-workers showed a low tolerance for manifestations of infantile, dependent relationships.

In making work placement decisions in integrated employment settings, the Genoa Project believes that a deep understanding of the personal and emotional world of the participant is essential for integration to be successful. This social-psychological emphasis is viewed as crucial because, although slow intellectual development may be related to biological factors, emotional immaturity tends to be related to early childhood experience, especially the tendency of families to react to the disabled by overprotecting such children and not attributing to them responsible roles that normal children usually hold in the family and society. This overprotective approach in effect creates a "double handicap" by perpetuating a dependent relationship into adult life which plays an important role in provoking rejection in the "normal" milieu, i.e. the workplace, school, etc.

The social implications of this overly dependent behaviour often are severe, particularly where unreasonable demands are placed on fellow workers, supervisors and, sometimes, customers. Recognising that the personal dimensions of the integration in work are underestimated in the domain of the labour market where pedagogical efforts have traditionally concentrated primarily on the acquisition of skills, the Genoa Project has insisted on focusing on the development of emotional and personal maturity.

{The role of co-workers}

Once a trial work site has been selected, the regular employees at the job-site ("co-workers") play an increasingly important role in project activities. Co-workers are provided training by the special transition team and assume full responsibility for specific job skill training of project participants. Co-workers are also responsible for providing ongoing technical and social support (with direct assistance from a field action group) during the trial work period and thereafter.

The project's experience, to date, confirms the wisdom of separating training related to social skills and work skills from specific job skills instruction. In practice, project participants have experienced no important difficulties in acquiring needed "job" skills and, indeed, co-workers are much more likely to fully understand the needed job skills than members of the special transition team. Project experience has demonstrated that even severely mentally disabled persons can acquire working sequences which are quite complex so long as the job in question does not require the "elaboration of an excessive quantity of information".

The process of job skill instruction has also led in virtually all cases to the establishment of crucially important "peer" relationships between the new disabled employee and co-workers. Young mentally disabled persons integrated into the world of work in the Genoa Project have shown a surprising capacity for learning due to the deep sense of well-being at finding themselves part of a team of workers inside a company.

{A mediation role}

One of the main strategies of the Genoa Project is "mediation". Here, the role of mediator is considered to be fundamental in bringing together two incompatible elements: a) young persons with severe mental retardation; and b) the open labour market. Without serious mediation between these two worlds with apparently incompatible rules and needs, successful transition and integration are not possible.

The structure and operation of the guiding committee, the central co-ordination team, the special transition team and the field action group all reflect the importance assigned to "mediation" between project participants and employers. The work evaluation and training process, for example, focuses almost exclusively on identifying and developing the skills needed to function effectively in the employment setting. Similarly, the active involvement of co-workers in job skill training and employment support ensures that constant mediation occurs between the individuals and the day-to-day demands of the workplace.

Another aspect of mediation is the way that important persons within the community are brought into the project. Such persons are almost always contacted via institutional channels. For example, contacts with employers are often made through the employer associations and contacts with workers are mediated by the preliminary involvement with unions.

## PROJECT ORGANISATION

### The guiding committee

The climate of uninterrupted political support in Genoa for the Project has contributed enormously to its ongoing stability and success. The principal role of the project's guiding committee has been to create and maintain that climate. The guiding committee is composed of representatives of public agencies, trade unions, chamber of commerce and employer associations, delegates from the local satellite offices of the Italian Ministry of Employment and representatives from organisations of parents and disabled adults.

Each member of the committee also serves as an ad hoc advisor and trouble shooter for the project. If problems arise involving the specific organisation or agency represented by a committee member, project administrators often turn to that member for assistance.

### The central co-ordination team

The central co-ordination team is the project's administrative and management arm. Operating under the supervision of the project director, the approximately 20 members of the team plan, supervise and monitor the overall project. In addition, members of the central co-ordination team are responsible for co-ordinating (on a day-to-day basis) project activities with the programmes and services provided by the various health and social services programmes operated by the local health agencies throughout the city.

Members of the central co-ordination team are employees of the project. A majority of team members are social workers; other team members include psychologists, vocational teachers and work organisation specialists. As is discussed below, members of the co-ordination team also serve as members of six or seven field action groups working with participants in the "trial work" and employment support phases of the project. Team members are thus involved simultaneously at two different levels of the overall project.

The co-ordination team conducts weekly meetings with each special transition team and field action group to discuss any questions which arise in the operation of the project at the participant level.

In reality, the different units of the local health agencies are or should be involved in the solution of a variety of problems which impact crucially on the overall success of the project (e.g. leisure activities, housing, individual and family therapy). When co-operation from other local health agency units appears necessary, staff of those units are invited to attend co-ordination team meetings.

According to the members of the central co-ordination team, the heaviest burdens are the moral and the professional responsibilities involved in having to be constantly ready to solve any type of problem that may arise in the operation of the project.

## Special transition teams

Within the Genoa Project, the responsibility for the pre-employment training of project participants rests with one of six special transition teams. Each transition team is composed of three members and is under the direction of a neuro-psychiatrist who is also a specialist in employment organisation. Other team members usually include a psychologist and a professional training instructor (usually a social worker). The primary role of the special transition team is to teach basic work skills to project participants prior to job-site integration. The enhancement of social and communication skills is also an important goal.

Each special transition team is assigned an "active" caseload of 15 young persons who are participating in the assessment and training phases of the overall project.

## Field action groups

Within the Genoa Project, field action groups manage the day-to-day support which is provided by the project to assist mentally disabled persons who are working in public or private employment settings as a result of project activities (i.e. during the trial work and employment support phase). A separate field action group is formed for each employer participating in the "trial work" activities of the project.

The membership of each field action group includes two members of the co-ordination team (a social worker and an instructor), a representative from the management staff of the participating employer and a trade union representative of the workers employed at the job site. The primary responsibilities of each field action group relate to "transition" problems which may arise for a participant at the workplace. Field action groups are expected to identify and analyse problems which have developed or may develop in an effort to find quickly an employment solution. Field action groups may seek advice or support from the central co-ordination team through joint discussion.

Each project participant is assigned to one of the six groups at the beginning of the one-year work placement phase. At present, field action groups have a caseload of approximately seven participants in the trial work phase and 20-25 former participants in permanent employment.

## PROJECT STRUCTURE

The goal of the Genoa Project is sustained, integrated and compensated employment for young persons with moderate and severe mental disabilities. The project may be conveniently divided into four principal operational activity components:

- the intake/assessment phase;
- the work evaluation and training phase;
- the private sector strategy; and
- the public sector strategy.

The intake/assessment and work evaluation and training phases of the project are identical for all participants. Following the completion of these phases, participants then pursue either the private or public sector strategy or are referred to sheltered workshops.

#### The intake/assessment phase

The initial selection of candidates for participation in the Genoa Project is subject to a complex set of rules and admission criteria. At present all potential participants must have a moderate or severe mental disability and must be between the ages of 15 and 30 years. A substantial "waiting list" currently exists for project participation, and careful attention has been paid to resisting any pressure for favouritism.

Following initial selection, each participant is assigned to a special transition team. Team assignment is based on the geographic location of the participant's residence.

During the first two or three months of project participation, the special transition team conducts an extensive "intake" process with each young person and his or her family. This process focuses on dynamic evaluation procedures within normal environments and includes assessments of social skills, communication skills and "adaptive behaviour" ("functional skills") in a variety of community environments. The team also consults extensively with family members, teachers and other community members familiar with the young person, and special attention is given to understanding the psycho-social background, incentive-motivation learning and communication "styles" of the participant.

The primary goal of the "intake" process is to create a comprehensive picture of the current functioning of the new participant in a variety of social settings and community environments. The emphasis of the process is on identifying strengths and "abilities" rather than deficits or disabilities.

#### The work evaluation and training phase

Upon completion of the intake process, the special transition team prepares an individualised work evaluation programme for each project participant. The goal of the overall work evaluation process is to identify the specific work and social skill "training" needs of each participant in order to function successfully in regular, competitive employment. The concept of "work skills" includes a knowledge of the rules of jobsite and the language of the work environment, and the capability to conform to the socialisation practices expected within the work environment between employees and supervisors, employees and co-workers, and employees and customers or clients.

The basic structure of the work evaluation and training process involves the assignment of the participant to a series of short-term work experience activities. In each of these activities, special transition team members initially assess the social and work skill demands, evaluate the performance (including productivity, co-worker and supervisor interaction and job satisfaction) of the participant (in consultation with the "temporary" employer and co-workers) and identify specific skill needs. Appropriate training is

then provided by team members and another short-term experience rotation is planned.

Work evaluation rotations are usually made for a 4-6 months period from among a wide range of jobs available at over 25 integrated employment sites (factories, businesses) which have agreed to participate in the work evaluation process. The large number of available work evaluation options permits the special transition team to pursue an individualised, flexible, diagnostic/prescriptive approach to the identification and development of crucially important work (as distinguished from specific job) skills, and related social, learning and communication skills.

Because of the individualised nature of the work evaluation process, the time required by participants to complete the process varies from two weeks to as long as four or five years. Participants receive a small hourly stipend from the Genoa Project for work performed during the work evaluation process.

When the special transition team concludes that the work evaluation process has been completed (i.e. the social and work skill preparation of the project participant has been optimised), a decision is made as to whether there is any reason why the participant should not enter the project's private sector strategy. The alternative courses of action are entry into the project's public sector strategy or referral to a sheltered workshop programme.

The private sector strategy

The goal of the private sector strategy is integrated, compensated employment within the competitive labour market. The strategy consists of three basic components: job identification, trial work; and ongoing employment support.

{Job identification}

The job identification goals of the field action groups are to identify companies likely to co-operate in employing persons with disabilities, to analyse the organisation and to seek out suitable jobs and functions. Representatives of employer associations, local unions and the local branch of the Ministry of Labour serve as members of the guiding committee and provide the Genoa Project exclusive economic, financial and technological information concerning individual firms, as well as an inside view of organisational patterns, the workings of social networks and attitudes of workers towards disabled people.

Each of the field action groups is responsible for identifying specific jobs within the overall workforce of participating employers which can be filled by project participants during the trial work phase of the project. The employment or work specialist attached to each team undertakes the job identification task in concert with the management and trade union members of the group who use an extensive network of job site "contacts" to identify specific job vacancies as they occur. The most important factors in successful job identification are the immediate availability of information on new job vacancies and full knowledge of the Genoa Project structure and operations.

The Genoa Project is committed to the principle of "natural proportion" of disabled and non-disabled persons in the workplace rather than the creation of a special work "enclave". In practice, there is usually no more than one project participant working at the same work site.

Once a prospective employer has been identified, he is sent a written description of the project along with a letter of presentation from the central co-ordination team. A few days later, project staff request a meeting to discuss the project in detail with both the employer and appropriate union representatives. If an agreement is reached regarding employer participation, the field action group assigned to that employer assesses the feasibility of filling existing job vacancies with disabled participants and the desirability of restructuring current jobs.

The job analysis and workplace assessment includes a careful task analysis of existing job structures. Tasks are split into single operations and an analysis of the information and skill demands are then matched against the general information and skill profiles of project participants. In addition, careful attention is paid to four additional factors: the potential danger to the prospective participant-employee and co-workers incident to job performance; the difficulty and complexity of the job in terms of technological demands; the difficulty and complexity of the job in terms of the organisational patterns of the workplace; and the receptivity ("climate") of the social networks within the workplace.

Following the completion of the job analysis and workplace assessment, the field action group meets with representatives of the special transition teams in an attempt to identify a suitable candidate for the job among current project participants. This selection involves the consideration of several factors, including age, skills and abilities, psychological and behavioural traits, distance from work and family conditions.

{Trial work period}

The purpose of the one-year trial work period is to provide the disabled young person and his family, on the one hand, and the employer and other workers on the other hand, with the experience of working together in a real employment setting without the job being final and irreversible. This period is viewed as a time for gradual adaptation, understanding and learning to work together.

Once a project participant who has completed the work evaluation and training phase has been matched with a job vacancy, the participant is assigned to a field action group. A contract is then prepared by this group for signature by the employer, the participant (and his or her parents) and the member of the field action group assigned primary responsibility for providing employment support during the trial work period.

The written contract spells out the conditions of the project and rules of behaviour to be respected. For example, it is agreed that once placement is made, the family will not have direct contact with the employer but will address all questions and problems to the field action group, who are in the position to mediate between the family and the employer. It is felt that if

the individual is to acquire status as an adult within the workplace, then it is necessary to separate this from the family situation, where he may still be considered a child.

The contract is neither extendible nor renewable and its terms cannot be modified during the trial work period. In the case of failure, for example, the contract may be terminated but the terms of the agreement may not be modified. The purpose of this apparent inflexibility is to avoid employers attempting to extend the special grant over the one-year limit or asking for systematic support from the service even after the end of the trial period. It is also a way of clarifying each party's responsibility and, therefore, defines the boundaries for successful integration.

Under the terms of the contract, the Genoa Project assumes primary responsibility for the trial period and undertakes to provide professional advice and support. During the trial work phase, the project also bears all civil liability related to the work performance of the participant. The contract provides that a stipend of 250,000 lire/month will be paid to the employer who then pays it as a wage to the disabled worker. During the trial work period the project participant is introduced into the workplace with the legal status of a student-apprentice. The participant is obliged to respect the employer's regulations and accomplish the specific tasks which are assigned.

The work specialist member of the field action group is responsible for improving worker awareness and securing good relations with the employer's management hierarchy. Another group member, the professional training instructor, accompanies the disabled worker on his first day at work and supervises, directly or indirectly, his period of apprenticeship. These two members of the field action group are jointly able to give a professional interpretation of the world of work from an organisational and ergonomic point of view and, equally, to comprehend fully the structural characteristics of the disabled person. They are, therefore, well qualified to ensure the success of the integration of the individual best suited to a position.

On the first day of work, the individual is accompanied to the workplace by a member of the field action group. This provides an opportunity both to assess the family's attitudes and fears concerning the new experience and to reassure them. In addition, difficulties that may be encountered in getting to the workplace can be identified and resolved. Few problems of this type usually occur because the team has acquired significant expertise through experience. Although regular employment support is available from the field action group during the trial work period, the aim is to gradually withdraw as soon as possible. Such support varies flexibly from routine monitoring by the field action group to joint involvement of the central co-ordination team in exceptional cases. If regular support is still necessary after one year, then the trial work experience is considered as having failed.

At the conclusion of the one-year trial work period, a joint decision is made among the parties to the trial work contract as to whether the participant will be permanently employed. If permanent employment is considered feasible, then the project participant will be hired under the same terms and conditions that would apply to any other worker. In practice, 93 per cent of the participants completing the trial work period have been permanently employed.

This remarkable success appears to be attributable to four crucial elements of the project design:

- the major concentration on social skills and work skills during the training phase;
- the strong bond that develops between the project participant and his or her co-workers and the direct involvement of the unions throughout the trial work period;
- the role of the guiding committee and the pride taken by employers in permanently employing project participants; and
- the flexibility of the contract period coupled with the project's refusal to offer an employer future trial work employees if there is an indication that the employer is simply looking for a series of "free" internships.

{Employment support}

If a project participant is permanently employed following the completion of the trial work phase, the field action group will provide support during the period of permanent employment. This ongoing employment support is not provided on a regular basis. Rather, during the first 3-5 years of employment, the field action group provides intermittent support (usually on a "crisis intervention basis") whenever it is needed to assist the participant to sustain permanent employment.

The types of services which may be provided during the employment support phase include personal and job counselling, adjustments to job change or restructuring and co-workers support training.

The public sector strategy

The goal of the public sector strategy is integrated, compensated employment within non-competitive, public employment for those project participants for whom it is determined by the special transition team that private sector competitive employment is unfeasible in the short term.

The public sector strategy follows the basic job identification process outlined above, except that the responsible field action group identifies suitable job vacancies (and potential job restructuring) within public (regional and local) agencies in Genoa.

Once a potential job is matched with an appropriate candidate within the project, a contract is prepared by the field action group for signature by the public employer, the project participant (and his or her parents) and the member of the field action group assigned primary responsibility for providing ongoing employment support. The contract is of indefinite duration and spells out the conditions of the project and rules of behaviour to be respected. Unlike the contract used in the private sector strategy, the terms of the public sector contract may be modified during the indefinite employment period as conditions warrant.

Under the terms of the contract, the Genoa Project and the other public agency involved share responsibility for the employment of the participant. The project agrees to provide professional advice and support for as long as may be necessary. The contract further provides that a stipend of 250,000 lire/month will be paid to the public employer, who then pays it as a wage to the disabled worker. Depending on work performance and interest, participants pursuing the public sector strategy may re-enter the work evaluation and training phase in an effort to "transfer" into the private sector strategy.

#### TRAINING OF PROJECT STAFF

Members of the special transition teams and field action groups receive initial orientation from project staff when they are first hired. This orientation explains but does not specifically prepare the new team member in any special way for the work to be carried out. One of the Genoa Project's major concerns has been the lack of experience or formal training of team members concerning the nature of factory work environments and the language of the workplace.

In most cases, specific expertise is acquired through a combination of on-the-job training (principally by co-workers) and in-service training. A need for greater expertise has been identified by project staff in areas related both to the working environment (such as new patterns of work organisation and new technology) and to project participants (such as learning processes, emotional development, and behavioural patterns in relation to group dynamics).

In response to these needs, a training programme in new patterns of work organisation and new technology has been developed in concert with a well-known research institute in Milan. Team members have also established an in-service training programme whereby theoretical models are examined against day-to-day experience in a manner which allows for a much greater understanding of the personal and social dynamics of project participants.

#### OUTCOMES AND IMPACT OF THE GENOA PROJECT

Over the last decade, the Genoa Project, in concert with the Italian approach to pre-school, elementary and middle school education, has yielded extraordinary success in supporting (in a highly cost-effective manner) the transition of young persons with moderate and severe disabilities from school to gainful employment and integrated community life.

##### Employment outcomes

One of the most impressive features of the Genoa Project is its documented and unparalleled success in making and sustaining work placements in competitive employment. Despite an unemployment rate for the city in excess of 12 per cent, the project has placed over 300 young persons with moderate and severe mental disabilities in integrated, compensated and competitive employment, with approximately a 95 per cent job retention rate over the first three years of employment.

## Cost-effectiveness

A study of the cost-effectiveness of the Genoa Project over the period 1978 to 1984 demonstrated net savings to local government agencies generated by project activities of approximately \$3 000 000. This figure was arrived at by comparing the costs of the project (i.e. participant stipends, staff salaries and service expenses) with the costs which the city would have incurred if project participants had been originally referred to sheltered workshops.

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILIES

One of the hallmarks of the Genoa Project is its concern for the young person with disabilities as part of a family unit. In terms of project philosophy, the Genoa Project believes that each young person with a disability should be viewed as a "whole" person. Accordingly, while the project focuses primarily on sustained integrated employment, the special transition team and the field action group devote a significant amount of time to work with the family in order to ensure that the newly acquired social role (i.e. as a "productive worker") of the adult child is also respected and maintained in the home.

The Genoa Project has also developed an excellent strategy for enlisting parents who appear uninterested or reluctant to have their children participate in the overall programme. When special transition team or field action group members encounter problems of this type, local parents' associations are used to "mediate" contacts between individual parents and project staff. The Genoa Project also plays an important "mediating" role between the family and the employer during both the work evaluation and trial work phases.

The Genoa Project has also developed an innovative "family adoption" programme for young persons with disabilities who enter the project from institutional settings. This strategy helps create a natural family environment for the participant during the course of the project and thereafter.

## PART III. CONCLUSIONS

The advantages of the Genoa approach to special education services are manifest, particularly for children with moderate and severe disabilities. The principle of normalisation operates from the beginning of the public education programme so that the social stigma caused by segregation never occurs. Not only do children with moderate and severe disabilities have continual exposure to social interaction with their non-disabled classmates, but the latter become familiar and remain comfortable with the appearance and behaviour of peers with moderate and severe disabilities. The development of social skills is obviously greatly accelerated not only by the curricular importance assigned to it, but also by the day-to-day demands of the integrated classroom environment.

This two-way process contributes enormously to building the positive psycho-social environment that is an essential ingredient of the transition process.

Because regular classroom teachers provide the basic instruction to all children, teacher expectations appear to be significantly higher than would be the case in segregated settings. Teachers and support teachers often work with the same group of children (handicapped and non-handicapped in natural proportion) so that individualisation becomes easier as teachers become more and more familiar with each child's learning and incentive-motivational styles. Support teachers are used to augment the overall resources available to the entire class and, thus, regular classroom teachers can work individually or in small groups with disabled children on certain classroom activities.

The availability of after-school teachers and the on-going role of the paediatric support team allows for the development of holistic approaches to each child and family. In addition, the special rehabilitation institutes offer highly specialised developmental and corrective services for children with moderate and severe disabilities without interfering with either classroom integration or reducing the total time available for educational instruction.

#### Work evaluation and training approach

The city of Genoa has developed a unique approach to vocational training for young persons with moderate and severe disabilities. This approach relies upon multi-disciplinary teams to provide individualised training focused primarily on the development of generic social and work skills through "work" evaluation rotations prior to the "trial work" period. A special transition team conducts an extensive "intake" process with each young person and his or her family in order to create a comprehensive picture of the current functioning of the new participant in a variety of social settings and community environments.

The team then prepares an individualised work evaluation programme for each project participant in order to identify the specific work and social skill "training" needed for each participant to function successfully in regular, competitive employment. The participant is then assigned to a series of short-term work experience activities in which team members evaluate his or her performance, identify specific skill needs and provide appropriate training.

Employers and co-workers are directly and substantially involved in the evaluation of work performance and in the development of needed "work" skills. The process is completed when the social and work skill preparation of the participant has been optimised.

#### Innovative trial work approaches

In addition to the flexible and individualised approach to vocational training, the city of Genoa has developed an innovative "trial work" approach which uses a combination of financial incentives, peer communication and active union involvement to encourage employers to "take a risk" in hiring and maintaining first-time employees with moderate and severe disabilities.

The Genoa Project has directly involved the leadership of the Genoa community (particularly city officials and major employers and unions) to create a positive climate for project activities and to serve as members of a

series of field action groups which analyse the organisation of work within a particular company and identify jobs and functions suitable for the project participants. In practice, there is usually no more than one participant working at the same work site. Once a participant has been matched with a job vacancy, he or she is assigned to the appropriate group.

The responsible field action group then prepares a contract for a one-year "trial work" period which spells out the conditions of the project and rules of behaviour to be respected. The contract is neither extendible nor renewable, and its terms cannot be modified during the trial work period. Under the terms of the contract, the Genoa Project assumes primary responsibility for the trial work period, undertakes to provide professional advice and support, and agrees to provide a stipend (paid through the employer).

Although regular employment support is available from the field action group during the trial work period, the aim is gradually to withdraw as soon as possible. At the conclusion of the one-year trial work period, a joint decision is made among the parties to the trial work contract as to whether the participant will be permanently employed. If this is considered feasible, then the participant is hired under the same terms and conditions that would apply to any other worker.

#### Ongoing employment support system

If a participant is offered a permanent contract by an employer following the completion of the trial work phase, the field action group will go on providing employment support on an intermittent basis whenever it is needed to assist the participant to sustain permanent employment. Employment support includes personal and job counselling, adjustments to job change or restructuring and co-worker support training. This support system relies heavily on co-workers and families to create a positive psycho-social environment for transition and to provide direct employment support, with assistance from a multi-disciplinary network.

Employers and co-workers are also directly and substantially involved in the ongoing support of disabled employees in order to build and maintain a climate of strong psycho-social support.

END-OF-TEXT