

5/1/15

ATTN: David Berthiaume

Office of Disability Employment Policy

US Department of Labor

200 Constitution Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20210

Mr. Berthiaume—

I request the opportunity to address the Advisory Committee on Increasing Competitive Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities during the public comment period of its upcoming meeting on May 11.

My name is Ben Allen-Kingsland and I will be speaking on behalf of SIMmersion LLC.

My proposed testimony is below.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ben Allen-Kingsland

Business Development Director, Health and Corporate Programs

SIMmersion, LLC

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All individuals with disabilities should have the chance to experience the empowerment that comes from competing for a job—and winning.

Being a competitive jobseeker requires preparation and practice. Most vocational training depends on one-on-one time with job coaches, case managers, or other professionals. Their work is critically important, but cannot be scaled up. A need exists for evidence-based, scalable solutions that can support face-to-face providers in the effort to increase rates of competitive integrated employment. At SIMmersion, we're working with our partners to fill that need.

We create virtual training systems to let users practice difficult conversations. Because the job interview can be a particular challenge for people with disabilities, we worked with Yale and Northwestern Universities on a system called *Job Interview Training with Molly Porter*, funded by the National Institute of Mental Health. In *Job Interview Training*, users engage in realistic role-play interviews with a virtual HR manager named Molly Porter. Molly has more than a thousand common questions and follow-ups she can ask, so no two interviews play the same way twice. Every choice the users make affects their relationship with Molly, whose mood can range from friendly and encouraging to formal or even impatient. She has several personalities that vary from play to play, so users get experience with different interviewing styles. An on-screen coach supports users at every step, and comprehensive scoring screens provide detailed, objective feedback on how they can improve. Users can even customize their experience by filling out a virtual job application before the interview. The information they share about themselves will inform the questions Molly asks.

A research team at Northwestern University compared adults with disabilities who used *Job Interview Training* to a control group of peers who did not. The adults who had used *Job Interview Training* got higher ratings on their skills in subsequent in-person interviews, and also reported greater increases in interview confidence than the group without the training.

Six months later, users of *Job Interview Training* were nine times more likely to have been offered competitive employment than their peers without the training. They also found work more quickly and went on fewer interviews before landing an offer. These real-world findings are published in a number of peer-reviewed journals, and have been replicated in a second study.

We're proud of *Job Interview Training* and the impact it's having for the many individuals and organizations using it right now. SIMmersion also recognizes that the interview is only one moment in the overall effort to find work and keep it. Individuals with disabilities experience higher-than-average job turnover once hired. For many, deficiencies in interpersonal "soft skills" are a key contributor. That's why SIMmersion submitted a proposal to NIMH for an expansive "day on the job" simulation that will help users build the social cognitive and coping skills necessary to navigate common workplace stressors and interactions with customers, coworkers and supervisors.

With *Job Interview Training* to help individuals with disabilities obtain employment and our proposed "day on the job" system to help them maintain it, SIMmersion is committed to helping organizations and agencies leverage the power of technology to realize a brighter future for their clients.