

# Practice Principles of Supported Employment

## Competitive employment is the goal

Employment specialists help clients obtain competitive jobs. Competitive employment is defined as paying at least minimum wage and a comparable wage that others receive performing the same work, based in community settings alongside others without disabilities, and not reserved for people with disabilities. People prefer competitive jobs to sheltered work. Working alongside others without psychiatric disabilities helps to promote inclusion and decrease stigma.

## Supported Employment is integrated with other mental health services

IPS services are closely integrated with mental health treatment. Employment specialists are members of multidisciplinary teams that meet regularly to review client progress. Discussions include clinical and rehabilitation information that is relevant to work, such as coping skills and strategies, individual strengths, medication side effects, persistent symptoms, cognitive difficulties, or other rehabilitation needs. They share information and develop ideas to help clients improve their functional recovery.

## Zero Exclusion: Eligibility is based on personal choice

Every person with severe mental illness who wants to work is eligible for IPS, regardless of diagnosis, symptoms, work history, or other challenges, including substance abuse. The philosophy of IPS is that all people with a disability who choose to do so can work at competitive jobs in the community without prior vocational training, and no person should be excluded from this opportunity. Agencies develop a culture of work so all practitioners encourage clients to consider working.

## Attention to each individual's preferences

Services are based on each individual client's employment goals, preferences and choices. Client preferences help determine the type of job that is pursued, the nature of support provided by the employment specialist and team, and how to proceed with job development and work incentive program choices.

## Benefits counseling is important

Employment specialists help clients to access ongoing guidance regarding Social Security, Medicaid, and other disability programs. Fears and concerns regarding disability benefits is a major reason that people with a mental illness may not seek employment. It is vital that clients obtain accurate information to develop their own plans for starting work and making decisions about changes in wages and work hours.

## Rapid job search

Employment specialists help clients seek jobs directly, rather than providing extensive pre-employment assessment and training, or intermediate work experiences. Beginning the job search process early (usually within 30 days) demonstrates to clients that their desire to work is taken seriously, and conveys optimism that there are multiple opportunities available in the community for clients to achieve their vocational goals.

## Systematic job development

Employment specialists develop relationships with employers, based on clients' employment goals and employers' needs, by meeting with employers in the community. Employment specialists learn about the work environment and the employers' work needs. They learn about jobs that they may not be aware of at employment sites. They gather information about the nature of job opportunities and assess for good job matches.

## Time-unlimited support

Follow-along supports are individualized and provided for as long as the client wants and needs the support. Employment specialists and other members of the person's support system and mental health treatment team provide work supports. The goal is to help the person to become as successful as possible in his or her vocational role. When an employed person has been stable with their job for about 9 – 12 months, then transitioning the person to supports outside of SE services is reviewed.