

Supported Employment

Implementation Resource Kit



EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES
Shaping Mental Health Services Toward Recovery

DRAFT VERSION
2003

Information for Consumers

For many people, work is an important part of the recovery process. But sometimes our talents and abilities are overlooked. Some people believe that because we have a mental illness, we are unable to work a job in the community. However, experience and research have shown that mental health consumers want to work and can work. We are capable of surprising those who doubt our ability to have a meaningful job. With the right type of work support, work can become a reality for many of us.

It can feel that all vocational programs are the same because they try to get people to work in workshops or places that only have jobs for people with disabilities. Fortunately, this is not always the case.

This sheet provides information about **supported employment**—a service that helps consumers find and maintain meaningful jobs in the community. The jobs are competitive (paying at least minimum wage) and are based on a person's preferences and abilities.

Work can have many benefits.

For most of us, work is part of our identity. When we feel good about having a job, we often see ourselves in a more positive way. Work provides structure and routines. Job income gives us more choices about what to buy, where to live, and gives us a chance to build savings.

When researchers have asked consumers if they want to work, nearly 7 out of every 10 consumers said they would like to have a job. Research shows 6 out of every 10 consumers can work at a job in the community if they are provided with the right types of services and supports.

Supported employment has helped many consumers already.

Researchers have studied different types of programs that help consumers find and keep employment. These studies compare supported employment to many other vocational approaches and they consistently find that supported employment assists more consumers with getting and keeping their jobs than any other approach.

Supported employment is based on six principles.

- ▶ *Eligibility is based on consumer choice.* No one is excluded who wants to participate.
- ▶ *Supported employment is integrated with treatment.* Employment specialists coordinate plans with your treatment team: your case manager, therapist, psychiatrist, etc.
- ▶ *Competitive employment is the goal.* The focus is community jobs anyone can apply for that pay at least minimum wage, including part-time and full-time jobs.
- ▶ *Job search starts soon after a consumer expresses interest in working.* There are no requirements for completing extensive pre-employment assessment and training, or intermediate work experiences (like prevocational work units, transitional employment, or sheltered workshops).
- ▶ *Follow-along supports are continuous.* Individualized supports to maintain employment continue as long as consumers want the assistance.
- ▶ *Consumer preferences are important.* Choices and decisions about work and support are individualized based on the person's preferences, strengths, and experiences.

Supported employment starts with you.

This program does not force you to work. With supported employment, you let employment specialists (people who work for a supported employment team) or other members of your treatment team (case manager, therapist, psychiatrist, etc.) know that you are interested in having a job. If you want to work, you will be given the supports and services to help you make your career goals a possibility.

Working part-time is also your choice. Employment specialists are trained to understand that you will be happier with a career that fits your needs rather than a job that you have to fit into.

Your job choices are important.

You may know of some careers that interest you, or have a work history. Employment specialists will listen to your preferences. The type of job that you will get through supported employment depends on your choices. If you are unsure about what specific career you want, your employment specialist can help you with questions and ideas about employment.

Taking tests, filling out forms and waiting for referrals are not required before starting in supported employment. Your employment specialist will start meeting with you soon after you identify work as a goal.

Employment specialists help you obtain information on how your benefits, such as Social Security or Medicaid, are affected by working.

Many consumers worry about starting work and how their benefits may be affected. Employment specialists assist you in obtaining accurate information. There are benefit programs that can help you continue to receive benefits, or partial benefits even when you are earning an income from work.

Supported employment is an ongoing service.

Employment specialists are available to help you plan your career, manage surprises that may come up at work, and develop ways to help you succeed after you have obtained a job. Working is sometimes stressful. When you are hired, an employment specialist will continue to provide supports and services.

It is not uncommon for people to change jobs a few times before finding a job they want to keep. Your employment specialist can talk with you about ending an unsatisfying job and looking for a better job match.

For more information:

Supported employment services are provided by numerous agencies across the country. If you are interested in knowing more about supported employment, or want to receive these services, contact staff at your local mental health or vocational agency.

Information about supported employment, as well as other evidence-based practices for the treatment of mental illness in the community, can also be found at www.mentalhealthpractices.org.