



Supported Employment Information For Policy Makers

"Our collaboration with Maryland's public mental health agency and community providers serving persons with significant mental illness has resulted in a tremendous expansion in employment. Current outcomes for supported employment in evidenced-based programs for the State of Maryland have reached a 70% rate of employment for persons with severe mental illness."

— Robert A. Burns

State VR Director, Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services

Evidence-based supported employment is a well-researched approach to helping people who are recovering from mental illness. Supported employment (SE) is effective with individuals of all ages and works in urban and rural communities. In fact, regardless of the economy, people with mental illness are more likely to find jobs if helped by supported employment programs than any other type of vocational service. In 15 of 16 randomized controlled trials, supported employment had significantly better outcomes.

State leadership is critical for supported employment implementation. Directors for Vocational Rehabilitation and Mental Health each have a vital role in dissemination of the evidence-based practice.

- **Facilitate effective collaboration between VR and mental health.** Clients who receive services from both systems have better outcomes. Begin with state leadership meetings to discuss how both VR and mental health can work together using supported employment principles.
- **Examine funding strategies to determine whether there is a current gap in revenue for any portion of the vocational process.** Ask agencies to provide feedback about their funding challenges.
- **Develop a system for ongoing fidelity reviews by trained fidelity reviewers.** For example, some states develop fidelity review teams consisting of the state supported employment trainer, members of the state leadership team, supported employment supervisors, clients, family members, VR supervisors and others. The fidelity review team members each commit to volunteer for a particular number of reviews each year.
- **Establish clear expectations for the evidence-based practice.** For example, some states reimburse programs at a higher rate when trained fidelity reviewers determine that those programs have achieved good fidelity to the model.
- **Voice support for employment as an essential component of recovery.** Make use of public appearances and written materials to express the importance of helping people with work.
- **Ensure that agencies have adequate technical assistance.** It is optimal for each state to have at least one full-time trainer who is available to spend time in the field working side by side with supported employment program staff and VR counselors. Ongoing technical assistance can be critical to prevent drift from the evidence-based practice.

How is Supported Employment different from other approaches?

Evidence-based supported employment	Traditional vocational approaches
Supported employment is a well-defined model based upon research. Approximately 60% of clients who access these services will obtain jobs.	Traditional programs vary in their approaches and are not based upon evidence. About 20% of clients who access these services will obtain jobs.
Integration of mental health and employment services is important. Employment specialists are usually employed by the mental health agency. They attend weekly meetings with clinicians to discuss clients and their goals. State Vocational Rehabilitation also collaborates closely with the supported employment programs.	Services are often brokered, meaning that clients receive mental health services at one agency and vocational services at another.
All interested clients are eligible. Motivation to work is an important predictor of success. Clients are not screened out due to substance abuse, symptoms, hospitalization history, treatment non-adherence, or other factors.	It is common for traditional programs to attempt to assess which clients are "ready" for employment and to screen out those who appear to have the most significant barriers to employment.
Clients are encouraged to meet with a person trained in benefits (i.e., Social Security, Medicaid, etc.) to learn how benefits would be affected by part or full-time employment.	Many traditional programs also offer referrals to benefit specialists.
Competitive employment is the goal. These are regular jobs in the community that pay at least minimum wage. They are not jobs that are set aside for people with disabilities.	Some programs focus on competitive jobs, while others focus on sheltered jobs such as sheltered workshops or groups of clients working under the supervision of staff.
The job search is rapid. Clients are not asked to participate in vocational evaluation or work adjustment programs, as these "pre-vocational activities" are not related to better employment outcomes.	Clients are frequently required to complete vocational testing, vocational adjustment programs or other pre-vocational groups before searching for a community job.
Client preferences are important. Client preferences may refer to type of work, job location, number of hours worked each week, work shift, disclosure of disability to employer, etc.	Some traditional programs offer only limited choices. This is problematic since, just like anyone else, clients tend to stay employed longer at jobs that meet their preferences.
Job supports are offered to working people on a continuous basis. The supported employment team provides long-term supports (typically for at least one year). Mental health practitioners sometimes provide supports to people who have been working successfully for more than a year.	Follow along supports are typically offered on a time-limited basis, often for 90 days.

"Supported employment is a critical component of change for mental health systems. Work is one way for clients to move beyond mental health services and it also helps clinicians realize the potential that clients have to recover from mental illness."

— John H. Magill
State Director of Mental Health, South Carolina

FOR MORE INFORMATION

IF YOU WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT OR OBTAIN ADDITIONAL RESOURCES PLEASE REFER TO THE FOLLOWING LINK AT THE DARTMOUTH PSYCHIATRIC RESEARCH CENTER.

<http://dms.dartmouth.edu/prc/employment>

Dartmouth PRC: (603) 448-0263

