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MassWorks: Quality Employment Services: Where Research and Practice Meet

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MassWorks.org redesigned!

Recently redesigned, www.massworks.org provides you with access to information on promising practices, new developments in the state, training and resources to help you in your efforts to assist individuals with disabilities with their employment goals. A new feature, the **MassWorks blog**, offers you the opportunity to hear what your colleagues around the state have to say and to join the dialogue as we all work to improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities in Massachusetts. Check it out today!

EVENTS

October 16th—Assistive Technology in the Workplace, Hartford, CT. For information or to register go to www.nercep.org or call 617/287-4337

October 23rd—Mission: Employment 3, Marlboro, MA. Visit www.massworks.org for more information.

November 6, 7 & 27th—Customized Employment: Meeting Business Needs, Portland, ME. For information and to register go to www.nercep.org or call 617/287-4337.

November 14th—Ask the DOJ is an opportunity to pose questions to DOJ on Title II and Title III of the ADA as well as seek their guidance on tough ADA policy issues. This is a tele-conference hosted by the DBTAC: Regional ADA Centers—register at www.ada-audio.org/Registration/

December 6th—Reaching, Engaging & Developing Motivation in Job Seekers, Northampton, MA. For information and to register go to www.nercep.org or call 617/287-4337

Pressed for time? Have trouble getting out of the office for training? Try NERCEP's online courses for employment service providers. Learn more at www.nercep.org

RESOURCES

The SAMHSA Implementation Resource Kits provide resources on Supported Employment at <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/communitysupport/toolkits/employment>.

T-TAP offers fact sheets, seminars and other resources on effective employment practices. Check it out at www.t-tap.org

Infolines is a monthly newsletter with up-to-date information on employment for people with disabilities including research highlights and policy updates. For subscription information go to www.trninc.com

Quality Employment Services: Where Research and Practice Meet

Introduction

Providing quality employment services to people with disabilities requires a substantial commitment of time, energy, and resources. Given this investment and our obligation to individuals with disabilities, we as providers must deliver the most effective services possible. Too often, services are developed based on either anecdotal evidence—our own experiences—or what funding agencies request. However, research has emerged that demonstrates that a core set of services—**evidence-based practices**—yields better employment outcomes.

What are Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs)?

EBPs are interventions that empirical research has found effective.

Are there EBPs in employment?

Yes. The federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) considers Supported Employment an effective approach that helps people with psychiatric disabilities find competitive jobs. Over the past decade-plus, multiple research studies using various designs have demonstrated that Supported Employment results in better outcomes.

A lot of programs call themselves “Supported Employment”—and they’re all different. How do I know which ones are evidence-based?

To be considered an EBP, a Supported Employment program serving individuals with mental illness must adhere to six **specific** principles:

- Eligibility is based on **consumer choice**. A person who wants to work can receive services despite their work or treatment history.
- **Competitive employment** is the goal. Programs help people get jobs in the community, in an integrated setting, paying prevailing wages.
- Supported Employment is **integrated** with mental health treatment.
- The **job search starts shortly after** an individual expresses an interest in working. It is not recommended that a person or be required to complete extensive pre-employment assessment and training before starting the job search.
- **Follow-along supports are continuous**. Individualized supports continue for as long as an individual wants assistance.
- **Consumer preferences** are important in determining placement. Providers increase their success when they help consumers get jobs that match their interests, skills, and abilities.

How do I know if a program is actually following the Supported Employment EBP?

The Supported Employment Fidelity Scale provides detailed standards for each of the practices above. Agencies can use this scale to determine the degree to which their services align with the key principles of Supported Employment, or as an excellent tool to guide the development of Supported Employment services.

It is important to remember that you **don't have to work for a Supported Employment agency** to apply EBP principles to an individual's employment goals. For example, a key principle is integrating mental health and employment services. Case managers can help clients create connections between clinical and vocational services. Residential staff can provide ongoing supports to residents who are working. Counselors can convey a positive message about work and assist people to explore their aspirations.

How can I start?

A section of the SAMHSA website focuses on EBP: <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/communitysupport/toolkits/employment>. These Implementation Resource Kits include articles, workbooks, and audience-specific tip sheets.

I don't work with people with mental illness. How does this EBP apply to me?

The most important message to take away is that **agencies should develop services based on research and data**. Promising research across disability groups can inform your programs. Associations such as APSE and the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (formerly AAMR) give members access to professional publications. Other practitioner-focused publications such as Infolines often highlight promising practices and new research findings. Check the resource section for additional information.

Services for Education and Employment Technical Assistance Project (SEE-TAP)

Since 1997, the Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH) has funded 22 Services for Education and Employment (SEE) programs. These programs offer services to DMH clients with serious mental illness who want to get more education and/or start working. SEE programs are based on Supported Employment EBP principles.

DMH and the Center for Health Policy and Research at the University of Massachusetts Medical School are collaborating on a review of the SEE programs. The Supported Employment Fidelity Scale is one of the tools being used to identify factors that impact employment outcomes. DMH plans to use the results to enhance SEE program operations and results. Technical assistance will be available in the final stage of the project.

SEE-TAP is part of the Medicaid Infrastructure and Comprehensive Employment Opportunities grant. For information, contact Alexis Henry (alexis.henry@umassmed.edu, 508-856-8833).

This issue of MassWorks was written by Rick Kugler and Cindy Thomas.

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