

## An IPS Supervisor's Guide to Community-based Services

Supporting IPS specialists to work away from their offices can be challenging, especially since so many workplaces have become virtual. But research demonstrates that community-based services are more effective, and that may be especially true for people who have the most mental health symptoms, or for those who do not feel confident about finding a job that they will enjoy. Seeing individuals in places where they like to spend time can help IPS specialists learn about their preferences and may increase engagement in IPS. It can even help working people to accept job supports because appointments are more convenient. Because IPS is about helping people integrate in their communities, it is in the spirit of IPS to provide services away from your center—because life is out there!

So how can IPS supervisors help IPS specialists make the move into the community? The most effective strategy is to go with individual specialists as they meet with clients and employers. For example, you could go with an IPS specialist to meet someone who was just referred to IPS to demonstrate how to engage people or to demonstrate active listening skills. If the two of you pick the person up at his home and go to a coffee shop, you will also be demonstrating how to work in the community. Another idea would be to accompany an IPS specialist meeting with someone who just accepted a job offer to talk about job supports. You might meet at a family home to discuss how everyone will support the worker. And IPS supervisors routinely go with IPS specialists to meet employers. They regularly take the lead to demonstrate learning about a business and then ask the IPS specialist to take the lead at the next business. Discussions between visits about what went well and what may work better next time are how IPS specialists learn how to improve their techniques. By working with specialists in different locations, you are not only providing excellent coaching, but you also demonstrate that you believe community-based services are important.

The following are more ways to help IPS specialists move into the community:

- Talk to the team about the reasons that you think it is important to work away from the office. Refrain from pointing out that community-based services are on the fidelity scale—instead share your beliefs about why working in the community matters. Your team cares what you think more than they care about a scale.
- Designate time during a team meeting to brainstorm all of the different places that specialists can meet with individuals (and family members). Post the list in the hallway or in your office.
- When IPS specialists talk about a job seeker's situation during supervision, ask where the specialist typically meets the person. If the specialist has been meeting the person in the office, ask why. Suggest other locations.



- If a specialist turns a Workforce Center (or another location) into a de facto office, explain how meeting locations should be individualized. Suggest meeting where individuals like to spend time or in locations that are convenient for people. Doing so will help IPS specialists engage clients and sustain relationships because appointments will feel positive to people.
- When IPS specialists report that job seekers want to meet in the office so they can piggyback IPS appointments onto mental health appointments, coach specialists to reply, “Great. When you are done meeting with your therapist, I will find you in the waiting room and we can go out together to follow up on job applications.”
- If a specialist is discouraged that a worker is not attending appointments, ask where she offers to meet the person. Point out that getting to the office is an extra barrier to attending a meeting. Meet people where they are already to reduce missed appointments.
- When job seekers are deciding what type of work they would like to do, suggest scheduling appointments at businesses for informational interviews rather than reading about jobs online. Being in the community for this activity will help jobseekers observe the work environment and talk to people who actually hold the job they are considering for themselves. And it will help the IPS specialist to begin building a relationship with a new employer.

*“We spend time visiting businesses to learn about the working environment and assess how employees interact with each other. Are supervisors courteous or do they snap at their employees? We value being offered a tour of a business. We had an opportunity to go on a tour of a recycling plant and watched employees operate the conveyor belt. We asked the manager a question about the position which prompted him to reply that he likes to hire conveyor belt operators who enjoy gaming. He explained that operating the conveyor belt has a tendency to give people motion sickness but that turns out to be not true for people who enjoyed gaming. You would never learn that from a virtual meeting.”* Brandon Hopper, IPS Program Supervisor at Solvista Health in Cañon City, Colorado

- Ask IPS specialists *how* they propose meeting locations. Some clients may say that they will meet at the office because that is what they have always done or because they do not want to create extra work for the specialist. To combat that, specialists can ask, “Do you want to work on applications at the library, the workforce center, or we can take my laptop to the McDonald’s down the block from your apartment. What is your preference?” Or “I’ll be in your neighborhood on Wednesday afternoon. How about if I pick you up at 2:00 and we can go to Sal’s Sporting Goods to talk to the manager?”

