

Employment Works!



This issue celebrates the role that employment plays in recovery for many people who have serious mental illness. Hearing from people who have returned to work underscores the importance of each person's own path.

Ted's Story

Ted is employed as a delivery driver for an auto parts store and says that it feels good to work and keep moving. But Ted also remembers when his life was not going so well. "A couple of years ago, I was super depressed. I didn't do anything. I just slept and drank a lot of beer. Eventually I got into trouble and a judge told me that I had to get therapy." Ted reports that mental health treatment helped him to feel better and eventually he told his therapist that he wanted to get a job. "I thought that I needed help from an employment program because of my criminal history. I was also worried that I would give up on the job search before I found some-

thing, but knowing that I had scheduled meetings with an employment specialist kept me going. I wanted to meet that obligation. My employment specialist gave me confidence that I would find a job and she also spoke to employers on my behalf."

Ted's Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, LaNay, said that it helped to use a team approach to support Ted in his return to work. "Ted's team included myself, his therapist, and employment specialist.

We met weekly to think of ideas to help Ted (and others) be successful at work. I explained to Ted that the meetings would help us stay on the same page so that his services would be more supportive and he liked that idea. Each person on the team was able to help in different ways. Ted's therapist tried to help him think about strategies to maintain his sobriety. He also had a conviction on his record, so his employment specialist and I helped him write a letter to prospective employers explaining how



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his life had changed since the conviction. We also brainstormed together with Ted about businesses that might have the types of jobs that he would like."

Ted wanted a delivery job so that he could work alone. Eventually he found work delivering auto parts. Although some people feel that work can be stressful, Ted doesn't agree. "I like going to work. When I am not delivering, I'm learning more about auto parts, which I

enjoy. But what is most important to me is having something to do every day. Sometimes the job is less stressful than being at home. When I am having problems with depression, mornings are the worst time. But I am scheduled to work in the afternoon and early evening, so this job is a good fit. It's not always easy, but I work hard at living a good life because I don't want to go back to where I was before. I'm proud of the progress that I've made." ♦

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What Are Realistic Employment Outcomes?

Program leaders in mental health and vocational rehabilitation agencies want to know what are employment benchmarks for people with serious mental illnesses receiving employment services. Benchmarks can be used to characterize levels of program success. Sometimes, benchmarks are defined by opinion leaders. But in this study, benchmarks are defined by employment outcomes from routine mental health settings implementing IPS (individual placement and support).

IPS is a supported employment approach for people with serious mental illnesses that has been validated in 16 randomized controlled trials. Across these studies, IPS achieved a mean competitive employment rate of 62%, compared with 23% for those in traditional vocational services (Drake, Bond & Becker, in press).

To determine benchmarks we used quarterly employment outcome data from IPS programs in 12 states and the District of Columbia participating in a national learning collaborative (i.e., Johnson & Johnson-Dartmouth Community Mental Health Program). Over an 8-year period, quarterly employment outcomes were reported. The number of sites in the collaborative increased gradually over the eight years. The number of people served on a quarterly basis increased from 792 to 9,359 and the number of people who obtained a competitive job (part time or full time) increased from 299 to 3,875. The average quarterly employment rate across all programs was 47%, ranging from 38% to 55%, and declining to 41% during the recent economic recession.

Percentiles were used to determine the benchmark standards. The 25th percentile was a minimum standard, the 50th percentile was used to identify good-functioning programs and the 75th percentile for high-functioning programs. Based on the overall average employment rate for each program, the 25th percentile was 33%, the 50th percentile (median) was 45%, and the 75th percentile was 57%.

Programs with outcomes below 30% are likely in start up or are in need of further training and technical assistance. Mature programs in this category are in need of an external fidelity review to identify areas for program improvement. An employment rate of at least 45% competitive employment is one indication that a program is functioning well. ♦

Drake, R.E., Bond, G.R., & Becker, D.R. *Individual Placement and Support: An Evidence-Based Approach to Supported Employment*. New York: Oxford University Press. In Press.
Becker, D.R., Drake, R.E., & Bond, G.R. 2011. Benchmark outcomes in supported employment. *American Journal of Psychiatric Rehabilitation*, 14: 1-7.

Bill's Story

For the past couple of years, Bill has been working as a school bus monitor and spending his free time with his family, but a few years ago his life was difficult. "I started feeling like everyone was out to get me and I had a hard time trusting my girlfriend and co-workers." Over time Bill's symptoms got worse and he had to seek treatment in a hospital. "I was hearing voices and thinking that I was in harm's way and that my family was in harm's way. It took about six months before I realized that I was safe. I think treatment from the doctors helped, but so did support from my family and my church. I also think that I just needed time to recover."

"After that I had to find a new place to live and a new job. My employment specialist, Suzanne, told me about the job as a bus monitor. Now my job is to keep the kids safe and under control. I really enjoy working with the kids. Work can be stressful, but it can also improve my mental health. It is really uplifting when my supervisor gives me a compliment."

Suzanne reported that she saw "incredible changes" in Bill after he began working. "Before he got the job, he didn't show much emotion and didn't appear confident. But after he was employed, he seemed happy and excited about what he was doing. Even Bill's physical presentation seemed healthier—he gained a few pounds and had more color."

Bill reports, "It might take some people awhile to get over their illness enough that they feel ready to get back into society. And a person may need to continue to have to deal with this illness over time, but that doesn't mean that the person's life is worse. In some ways it might be better. I'm proud of the fact that I survived a tough situation. ♦

Laura's Story

Laura is 35 years old and is from Piacenza (Northern-Italy). Italy has recently joined the Johnson & Johnson-Dartmouth IPS supported employment learning collaborative.



"I entered the IPS program about one year ago. At the very beginning I was a skeptic about the success of this program because of my previous experiences with assistance offered by other organizations. I felt they were minimally interested in persons like me, with a

mental disorder. I have a bipolar disorder."

"In that period of my life, the support of the IPS worker who was sensitive to my problem was just what I needed. Valentina (the IPS worker) helped me to write a good curriculum vita, according to the European regulations and brought out my qualities. She prepared me to face a job interview, and most of all, she helped me to deal with daily problems. Knowing she was with me was a determinant for me. I knew that in every moment there was a person who believed in me and who supported me in case of difficulties and even in case of failure."

After job searching for a few months, Laura became employed at a restaurant. She is able to perform her job well and was even sent to London for two-weeks to complete a training course.

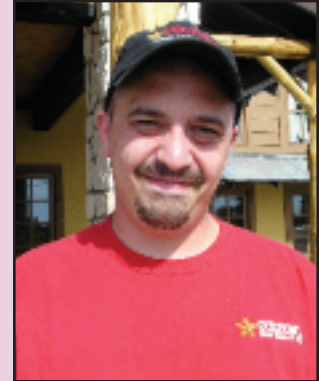
"I am more conscious and confident in my capabilities as I was able to maintain a job that I found difficult and I was also able to see what was positive about the job. I wish to tell everybody who will enter the IPS project in the future that what is most important is to get back into the working world without being afraid of being inadequate." ♦

Evidence-based supported employment

is also known as individual placement and support (IPS). These are the same practices and use the same procedures, scales and approaches. Often the term "supported employment" is used in a generic sense and is not synonymous with evidence-based supported employment or individual placement and support.

Tyler's Story

Since he's gotten a job, Tyler reports that he no longer feels worthless. He's also been able to buy furniture, get dental work done, and has plans to get married at the end of the month. "Mental illness can make it hard to work at times, but I try to push through that. I even have to walk to work some days, four miles each way, but work is really important to me. I feel so much better when I'm working.



I work at a restaurant as a grill cook, but I do a little bit of everything. I work on sauté, on the pastas, I check the plates before they go out to the customers, help with the dishes... I started as a fry cook, but I've since been promoted to sauté cook. My goal is to watch what people do at all of the stations in the restaurant so that I can move up to become a trainer. I love the job. I like working with food and I like the people who work there.

I had been having a hard time getting up and getting motivated to go look for jobs, but my employment specialist came over to my house to talk to me about my goals and what I was interested in doing for work. At that point I told her that I would do anything, but the truth is that food and restaurants is really what I'm good at. She helped me feel more motivated and we went out together to apply for jobs. It didn't take long to find this job. Now my employment specialist stays in touch with me to ask how the job is going and she stops by the restaurant to talk to my boss. I love working with her—I like the extra boost I get from her encouragement.

In my opinion, work is what you make it. I have high anxiety and the restaurant business can be very stressful. There are times that I get upset but I just remember that tomorrow is another day and I don't give up. The good thing about this program is that you don't feel worthless anymore. I'm proud of what I am accomplishing."

Note: Since this story was written, Tyler has achieved his goal of becoming a trainer. He now travels to various restaurants owned by his employer to train new employees. ♦

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Online Training in IPS SE

Interested in learning more about IPS Supported Employment?

A brief overview of this approach is available at no cost to any person who is willing to invest 40 minutes in taking an online module. To view, go to: <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~ips> and select "What is IPS Supported Employment?" Then choose, Introduction to IPS - Unit 1 of Online Course.

For practitioners of IPS supported employment, a 9-unit online course is available. For more information, please go to the website above and choose "Skills for IPS Practitioners."

The Johnson & Johnson-Dartmouth Community Mental Health Program welcomes Italy!

In September 2011, Italy joined the IPS learning collaborative that is now comprised of the following states: Connecticut, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Vermont, Wisconsin, and Washington D.C.

