

# Employment Works!

## Employment Supports for People with Mental Illness



Fall 2007

Sponsored by the Johnson & Johnson – Dartmouth Community Mental Health Program

### State Mental Health and Vocational Rehabilitation Directors Meeting

On October 15-16, the Johnson & Johnson-Dartmouth Community Mental Health Program hosted a meeting of state directors of vocational rehabilitation and mental health on the campus of Dartmouth College in Hanover, NH. Leadership from the nine participating states and the District of Columbia met to discuss strategies for strengthening and promoting supported employment efforts in the states.

#### Bobby Silverstein, JD

(<http://www.disabilitypolicycenter.org>)

presented the keynote address.

Mr. Silverstein led an interesting and timely discussion regarding the effects of disability policy (sometimes intended, sometimes unintended effects) upon persons with psychiatric disabilities, including people receiving supported employment services. As an example, Mr. Silverstein discussed the possible repercussions of the new regulation for the Rehab Option. State directors shared and discussed challenges and strategies in funding supported employment programs.



Bobby Silverstein, JD

#### Pat Deegan, PhD,

(<http://www.patdeegan.com/>) presented Common Ground, an innovative internet-based program that allows people with mental illness to engage in shared-decision making with their physicians. Dr. Deegan explained that shared decision-

making assumes that there are two experts in the room—the practitioner and the person receiving services. Also, that "personal medicine" such as spending time with one's children, enjoying hobbies or working at a rewarding job, should be the goal that "pill medicine" strives to support.



Bob Drake, MD, PhD and Pat Deegan, PhD

#### Finally, Bob Drake, MD, PhD

(<http://dms.dartmouth.edu/prc/>), Director of the Dartmouth Psychiatric Research Center, led a group discussion on the impact of information technology and patient-centered healthcare.

### Supported Employment Practice Principles

- Every individual who wants employment is eligible
- Supported employment services are integrated with treatment
- Competitive employment is the goal
- Personalized benefits counseling is provided
- Job search starts soon after a person expresses interest in working
- Follow-along supports are continuous
- Individual preferences are important



### Supported Employment Resources

#### *A Working Life for People With Severe Mental Illness*

Becker & Drake, 2003,  
Oxford University Press  
[www.oup.com](http://www.oup.com)

#### *Evidence-Based Mental Health Practice: A Textbook*

Drake, Merssens & Lynde, 2005,  
W. W. Norton & Co.  
[www.wwnorton.com](http://www.wwnorton.com)

#### *Principles and Practice of Psychiatric Rehabilitation: An Empirical Approach*

Corrigan, Mueser, Bond, Drake,  
& Solomon, 2007, Guilford Press  
[www.guilford.com](http://www.guilford.com)

#### **SE Materials**

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

- SE Educational Materials
- SE DVDs
- Previous *Employment Works!* newsletters
- J & J – Dartmouth Community Mental Health Program
- Supported Employment Posters

### Supported Employment Trainer Training

We are planning a 3-Day SE *Train the Trainer* Institute for 2008

If you are interested please contact:  
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## Supported Employment in Vermont

### Diane Dalmasse, Director of the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Vermont has been working with the Johnson & Johnson – Dartmouth Community Mental Health Program for a little over 5 years, but as far back as the 1980s, there have been people here who were champions of supported employment. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) has a long history of believing that it is important to serve people with the most severe disabilities, so it was a natural fit.

Collaboration between mental health and VR has been a hallmark of the Vermont approach. We've found that people who are served by both VR and mental health are three times more likely to go to work than those who receive services from only one system. We each bring strengths to the table and we're more effective working together than in isolation. It's a win-win.

Joint funding has enabled many more people to be served through supported employment. We also have liaison counselors assigned to mental health centers and that has fostered strong working relationships at the local level. At the central level we also have good relationships and an SE coordinator for VR, Glen McClintock, has been instrumental in building the partnership between VR and mental health.

We have recently developed a Supported Employment Leadership Council to focus on how we can take employment for persons with severe mental illness to the next level. We've come up with an RFP to help supported employment programs build capacity and increase outcomes. We want to re-energize agencies around employment. Another focus of the Council is fidelity. We are great believers in using the fidelity scale and the group is talking about ways that we can build capacity to conduct fidelity reviews on a regular basis.

Some larger states may feel that the lessons in Vermont don't apply to them, but I believe that larger states can take what



we've learned and apply those lessons to areas or counties with the same results. It's really a matter of each system taking time to understand each other and find a common mission.

***“We’ve found that people who are served by both VR and mental health are three times more likely to go to work than those who receive services from only one system. We each bring strengths to the table and we’re more effective working together than in isolation.”***

**Michael Hartman, Vermont Commissioner for Mental Health** is a long-time advocate for employment and supported employment services.

The longer that I work in this field, the more I am absolutely convinced that employment is a key piece of people getting into a stable and fulfilling life. Whether it's full-time work or an hour a week, it helps people integrate in their community. I live in a small community (about 10,000) and I worked for a mental health agency here for many years. I've run into people I knew while they were working on their jobs and that was meaningful to me. I have seen many people go through the struggle of finding recovery and it's never failed that having a job, getting out of the social service system and feeling that they have a role to fulfill in the community was a great catalyst.

Vermont began focusing on psychosocial rehabilitation in the early 1980's. We stumbled around with that for a while but didn't have much structure around getting people help with competitive jobs until we

started focusing on supported employment. Over the past five to ten years, we've been able to dispel the myth that people have to be ready for work. Learning about recovery and looking at the work done by Mary Ellen Copeland helped us to develop a new philosophy. When we started to think of people as being capable of recovery, the groundwork was in place to help people with employment.

Now we're a little further down the road and supported employment is available in every mental health center. We have a person in our central office, Laura Flint, who is responsible for working with all of the agencies on supported employment. Further, we ask agencies to report

outcomes for competitive employment for all persons with serious mental illness on a quarterly basis and those outcomes are shared with all agencies so that they can learn from each other. Finally, agencies are asked to develop plans to keep employment moving forward.

Our next step is to figure out how to help more people enter employment. Currently, 30% of people with severe mental illness in Vermont are employed in competitive jobs. But we know that more people want to work. The literature points to up to 70% of people wanting to work. Leadership should be pushing for better outcomes, not be comfortable with current employment outcomes. So it's the responsibility of the service system to see employment as being on the same level of other services such as medication and housing. Employment is really part of a platform where clients are making their own decisions and participating in their care.

### Kevin's Story

**Kevin Griffin, Rutland, VT**

I work for a nursing home. I work in the kitchen and I'm a dietary aide. I usually work afternoons or nights. I get the food line set up. I make sure the dish machine is set up. After the food line is done, we clean up the kitchen. I've been working



there for about four years and I like it. We've got a good bunch of people there. Everyone wants to work. It makes the job more fun when people are there to work and want to work.

Things are good with my boss, as well. I hear that she likes my work. When



Kevin Griffin

you're working, the less you depend on the boss, the better. If you see something that needs to be done, just do it. I like my job

because I know what to do and I can work independently. I feel proud that it's a good, clean kitchen.

Before this job I went a few years without working. But one day I went to the VR office and asked if they could help me with a job. They helped me make contacts with employers and helped me look for the kind of job that I wanted. I access all kinds of help. I have a case manager and a job counselor too.

**The number one reason that I work is money. As a result of the job, I was able to get a loan for a good car and I've actually paid it off which is something I never thought I would be able to do. By next summer I expect to be able to buy a house with my girlfriend.** There is a program that helps people buy houses and I am working with them. I've been working on saving money for the down payment for the past year or two. The program will help me look for a place that I can afford so that I won't get into more debt than I can afford.

But work also gives me a good feeling about myself. It makes me feel good to have something to do. I want to support myself. It's also good to get out and see people. When you're on disability, most of your money goes to food and rent. Now I have options. I can do more for myself.

## Employer to Employer

**Karen Nashshad - Director of Nutritional Services for Eden Park, Rutland, VT**

There can be a lot of pressure working in a large kitchen. I need people who can get along well with others when the tension is high, but who are also able to work independently. I also look for people who are dependable and punctual. If one person doesn't show up, it puts everyone behind.

I met Dave, an employment specialist from a supported employment program, about four years ago. Dave called me and then came in to meet with me. He explained that he helps people who have been out of the workforce for a while and said that he helps them get back to work. I liked the idea of working with a program that is good for the community. I think it is good for people to work and to know that they can be assets to their communities.

I did have some concerns at first about whether or not the person would be able to do the job and be able to fit in. But Dave put me at ease. He explained that he would be available if there was ever a problem. And that's been absolutely true. Even if Dave is on vacation, he works with a team so I can always reach someone. Dave also offered to bring Kevin in so that I could meet him for myself.

Kevin has been a wonderful employee. He started out working just 12 hours per week but he can do more than one shift now and he's also available at different times of the day. He's always here and he is always pleasant. He is one person that I don't have to worry about. If Kevin is on the schedule, I know everything is ok. That isn't the situation with all of the people I have hired in the past!

Kevin was a great match for this job and I think that was the most important thing. If I were to give advice to other employment specialists, I would suggest that they visit the workplace and get an understanding of the job, of the employer's needs. I would also suggest that they know their clients well. Finally, I would also advise other employers to try a program like this. It's a great way to be a part of the community and to find good employees!

## Tips for Individualized Employment Plans

— Dave Smith

Dave Smith is an Employment Coordinator at Rutland Mental Health Services, Inc. in Vermont. He explained that his program tries to help people find jobs that are related to their preferences. People who are engaged in supported employment from his agency are working in a variety of jobs, for example, full-time teaching jobs, retail sales, housekeeping, film editing, corrections, and food service. Below, Dave gives his tips for helping people find jobs related to their interests:

- **Don't ignore a client's vocational goal, no matter what it is.** If you are uncertain whether or not the goal is viable, try to remember that you don't really know for sure. Instead, ask questions about the person's goal. What do you know about this type of work? What are your experiences related to this type of work?
- **Write down a plan to help the person reach the goal. Include small steps.** Sometimes, as the plan unfolds, people will decide that they don't want to commit to the long-term process of reaching that goal. If that happens, talk to the person about jobs that are related to their original goal.
- **Avoid the temptation to reach for the easiest job to obtain.** For instance, if someone wants to be a chef, don't push for a dishwashing job.
- **Spend time getting to know each person well.**
- **Be familiar with the community.** Know the workplaces in the community, as well as other resources, such as schools and training institutions.
- **Help people learn about jobs.** Sometimes a person might ask for help finding the same type of work he has always done. In that case, you might try to figure out if that is really the person's passion, or if the person is fearful that no one will hire them to do something else. Help people learn about jobs in the community by visiting jobs and talking about jobs. Point out skills and aptitudes that could be transferred from a previous job to a new type of work.

## Focus on Research\*

While there are many studies showing the effectiveness of evidence-based supported employment (SE), surprisingly few studies have compared SE to well-established psychiatric rehabilitation programs. In this study, we randomly assigned 187 consumers with severe mental illness to SE or to a well-known vocational program at Thresholds, a psychiatric rehabilitation center in Chicago with over 30 years experience providing employment services. The Thresholds "Diversified Placement Approach" (DPA) emphasizes assessment of work readiness and offers consumers a range of employment options, including agency-run businesses and agency-contracted placements with community employers.

Our findings were that SE participants had much better competitive employment outcomes over a two-year follow-up period. During follow-up, 75% of the SE group obtained a competitive job, compared to 34% of the DPA group. Similarly, twice as many SE participants as DPA participants held a competitive job working 20 hours or more a week (47% versus 23%). Moreover, SE participants expressed greater job satisfaction with the jobs they obtained than did DPA participants. In addition, SE participants averaged nearly twice as much in earnings from competitive employment than did DPA participants (\$5,000 versus \$2,600). Another important finding was that the average length of time in longest-held competitive job was 37 weeks for SE participants who worked competitively –

quite a bit longer than that reported in the majority of earlier supported employment studies. Finally, when we compared SE to DPA on all types of employment, including agency-run businesses, the employment outcomes were similar. **The importance of this study is showing that evidence-based supported employment can be implemented with high fidelity in a relatively short period of time with superior competitive employment outcomes compared to those for a well-established vocational program not using evidence-based principles.**

\*Bond, G. R., Salyers, M. P., Dincin, J., Drake, R. E., Becker, D. R., Fraser, V. V., & Haines, M. (in press). A randomized controlled trial comparing two vocational models for persons with severe mental illness. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*.

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