

Family Advocacy for IPS and Employment

The International IPS Learning Community includes family as a core stakeholder group. Families participate in three ways. First, family leaders educate IPS teams regarding the important roles that family can have in supporting their family member through the process of job seeking, working a job, and advancing in a career, sometimes with further education. Second, families help educate other families and community members about the benefits of IPS supported employment and the role of work in the recovery from behavioral health conditions. Third, family members help promote expansion of IPS services into other communities in their state and help sustain services by advocating with the state legislature for policy and budgetary supports for IPS programs.

Many of the family advocates are connected with the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) state organizations. Family leaders coordinate educational and advocacy efforts with the state IPS teams that are part of the International IPS Learning Community. Typically, the IPS state teams include representatives from the state mental health authority, state Vocational Rehabilitation, and state IPS trainers.

The IPS Employment Center facilitates bi-monthly calls with family leaders to share updates on family activities, host guest speakers, discuss challenges, and plan future activities. The family leaders attend the annual meeting of the International IPS learning community to connect with their peers and learn about advances in IPS research, implementation, and sustainment. Some of the family activities have included:

- Making presentations at local NAMI affiliates and at mental health agencies to share family interest in IPS, increase communication, and improve trust.

- Working with IPS staff to improve the quality of IPS supported employment, participating on local IPS supported employment steering committees, and participating on IPS supported employment program fidelity reviews.
- Serving as presenters at NAMI events and programs to encourage and inform families to increase involvement in employment and education activities to improve care coordination and help loved ones attain employment goals.
- Making community presentations about IPS, the family interest in work and its benefits to consumer recovery.
- Testifying at public hearings and events about the importance of employment and education contributing to an individual's recovery and the successful outcomes attributed to the IPS model.
- Developing televised public service announcements about IPS and return to work stories.

The families participating in the International IPS Learning Community are dedicated to making a difference. At the state and national levels, families are influencing public policy regarding employment services for people with behavioral health conditions. On a local level, families are a resource for advocating for high quality services. Effective strategies include partnering with leaders from mental health services, state Vocational Rehabilitation, and NAMI.

Member states/jurisdictions: Alabama, Alameda County (California), Colorado, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Maryland, Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Vermont, Washington, Wisconsin, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain.

Family members who are interested in more information, contact Mike Cohen who is coordinator of the family group in the International IPS Learning Community:
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