

ROLE OF THE IPS SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT TRAINER

The implementation of evidence-based IPS Supported Employment services is a complex process that involves philosophical, organizational and programmatic changes. These changes typically involve mental health agencies and Vocational Rehabilitation offices, but may also affect peer or consumer-run organizations and family advocacy organizations.

Assess current practices, organizational structure and philosophies

The trainer should spend time at the mental health agency and local Vocational Rehabilitation office to learn how services are currently provided. Trainers and state implementers can use any or all of the activities outlined below to gain an understanding of current practices.

Assess readiness for implementation. Before selecting a site for IPS implementation, a trainer should spend at least a few hours meeting with agency administrators, observing a employment unit meeting, speaking with the employment team, talking to clients who have received employment services, and meeting with a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor and supervisor. Within two weeks, the trainer should provide feedback to the agency about practices and organizational structures that are consistent with IPS supported employment, as well as changes that the agency and system would need to make in order to implement IPS supported employment. An example of a site readiness checklist may be found at www.ipsworks.org, select “For Trainers.”

Provide training and consultation

Provide information about IPS to employment specialists, mental health practitioners, Vocational Rehabilitation counselors, peer groups and family organizations. Employment specialists need to know how to conduct the career profile, discuss disclosure of a disability, use good client interviewing skills, develop relationships with employers, conduct effective job searches, and provide individualized job supports. Mental health practitioners need to understand basic information about the IPS supported employment approach, as well as strategies to help people consider employment. Vocational Rehabilitation counselors should be invited to most, if not all, training to understand the IPS approach. Peer, or consumer-lead groups, should receive information about IPS services and may have helpful feedback to the organization about implementation. Finally, families are an important stakeholder group for IPS supported employment. Trainers should reach out to local family groups and organizations. A sample training plan may be found at www.ipsworks.org, select “For Trainers.”

Classroom-style training is helpful in that it can help people adopt new philosophies and also develop a vision about how services will be provided in the future. But most people have difficulty changing the way that they provide services without side-by-side

assistance. Therefore, IPS trainers work alongside practitioners to model new skills and help solve unanticipated problems. **In order for programs to make significant changes, trainers should visit new programs at least twice each month.** Between visits, some consultation may be provided by phone. Recommended activities include the following:

- *Mentoring for job development.* Go with employment specialists to meet with employers. Model interacting with an employer and then ask the specialist to take the lead with the next employer. Process the experience with the specialist, being sure to point out some positive things that the person did, as well as some strategies that he might try the next time.

Ask supervisors to go out with you and an employment specialist at least quarterly. Let the supervisor make some employer contacts. Ask the supervisor to go out with her staff on a regular basis to help them learn how to develop relationships with employers. Call supervisors to talk about their efforts to field mentor this important skill.

- *Attend IPS supported employment team meetings* in person, or by phone. Participate as a team member making occasional suggestions and asking questions. Demonstrate to the team how to use IPS supported employment principles when brainstorming solutions to help clients with their employment goals. Talk to the IPS supervisor after the meeting to share observations or suggestions.
- *Meet with the IPS supervisor* by phone, or in person, on a quarterly basis to review program outcomes. Discuss outcomes that are strong and ask about outcomes that are a concern. Help the supervisor develop plans to mentor employment specialists who are having difficulties. For example, if a particular specialist has trouble engaging newly referred clients, the supervisor could ask the specialist where he meets with new people, she could also attend a few appointments with new clients and demonstrate how to engage with people in a positive way.
- *Attend mental health treatment team meetings.* Assess how well IPS supported employment is integrated into the mental health teams. Does the employment specialist participate in the entire meeting? Is employment included in many of the client discussions? Do mental health practitioners help generate ideas for jobs or job supports? If not, help by asking questions about individual clients as they are discussed. “Does anyone have ideas about ways to help Roberto manage his work income?” “What type of job supports does anyone think would be best to help Ivy with her new job?”
- *Ask employment specialists to talk to you about someone on their caseload who is having difficulty meeting his goals.* Ask the employment specialist if you can go with them the next time she is meeting with that person. Share observations or suggestions after the meeting.

- *Attend an occasional meeting between the Vocational Rehabilitation program and IPS team* in which caseloads are discussed. Help celebrate successes and generate ideas to help clients with their working lives.
- *Organize statewide IPS supervisor meetings.* Many states, countries, and regions, organize supervisor meetings to provide additional training, as well as opportunities for supervisors to share strategies with each other. These groups typically meet once each quarter for a half day.

Provide technical assistance through IPS supported employment fidelity reviews

Allow agencies at least six months to participate in IPS training and to begin implementing IPS before the first fidelity review. The purpose of waiting is so that the agency can show progress through the fidelity review. IPS fidelity is intended to be a quality improvement tool, and agencies benefit most from fidelity reviews when the process is strengths-based.

Agencies continue to participate in IPS fidelity every six months until good fidelity is achieved and annually thereafter. IPS trainers work with IPS supervisors and steering committees to improve fidelity between fidelity visits. They help the committees develop written plans for better fidelity and also offer training and technical assistance targeted at those areas that programs leaders would like to improve. Detailed information about fidelity visits, fidelity reports, and fidelity action plans can be found in the Evidence-Based Supported Employment Fidelity Review Manual (www.ipsworks.org, select “For Trainers.”)

Help with organizational changes

Trainers ask agency administrators for help with IPS implementation. Often, the executive director, chief operating officer or clinical director are the positions that have the authority to make necessary changes. For instance, some agencies do not have mental health team meetings that provide clinical supervision in a group format. If this is the case, the IPS trainer would talk to administrators about the benefits of integrated services and would help agency leaders make plans to implement mental health treatment team meetings with participation from employment specialists. Trainers find it helpful to identify an agency champion for IPS supported employment who can help navigate the organizational culture for making changes.

Some agency leaders will make large changes quickly, while others are more likely to change if incremental goals can be identified. In the example above, agency administrators who balk at weekly meetings might be willing to begin with monthly mental health practitioner meetings. After a few months the trainer could ask administrators to talk to supervisors in order to find out if the meetings were helpful, and to evaluate the prospect of more frequent meetings.

IPS steering committees or leadership committees are another approach to help agencies with organizational change. Information about steering committees is available at www.ipsworks.org, select “For Trainers.”

Discuss goals for competitive employment with agency leaders. Do they know how many people with serious mental illness at the agency have competitive employment? What would be the benefits of increasing that number? How does employment fit into the mission of the agency? How will the agency monitor progress in this area? Does the agency differentiate between competitive jobs and other types of employment?

Provide statewide leadership for IPS supported employment

Trainers should learn about financial barriers to IPS implementation. If funding is not available for a part of the vocational process, such as long-term job supports, it is up to the state departments to identify revenue for those services.

Trainers help identify systems barriers to IPS supported employment. For example, if Vocational Rehabilitation has traditionally used vocational evaluation prior to helping people find employment, state Vocational Rehabilitation leaders may be needed to help change this practice.

State, country, or regional leaders for IPS make plans to expand IPS supported employment. The purpose of implementation is not to have a few boutique programs in select areas, but to make the evidence-based approach widely available. IPS leaders gradually increase the number of programs that offer this practice while ensuring that enough technical assistance will be available to programs. Typically, a full-time trainer will work with three to four programs for the first year and slowly add additional sites. It is important to have high quality programs that produce good outcomes before expanding.

State leadership committees operate much in the same way that local steering committees work to develop goals and action steps for better implementation. The difference is that the state committees think about statewide barriers and facilitators for IPS supported employment. For example, a state leadership committee might hear from the trainer that only a few sites are using Medicaid (a government program that pays for medical services) for appropriate IPS services. In response, the committee could host trainings to explain which services are billable and how to document services. Or, the trainer might share information about the way that a particular Vocational Rehabilitation office collaborates with the local IPS supported employment program. In response the state committee might decide to share those strategies with Vocational Rehabilitation offices across the state. Membership for state committees could include state-level Vocational Rehabilitation administrators, Vocational Rehabilitation supervisors from local offices, state IPS trainers, liaisons from the state department of mental health, representatives from family organizations, consumer advocacy organizations, leaders from mental health agencies, employers, etc.