



Dear NAMI Office,

This packet of information is about an evidence-based practice of supported employment in your state called Individual Placement and Support (IPS). An evidence-based practice is one that has been researched multiple times, by different researchers, and found to be effective. IPS helps people living with behavioral health conditions (mental illnesses and substance use disorders) work at regular jobs of their choosing. Although variations of supported employment exist, IPS is the only form of supported employment that is evidence-based.

Family members can be active participants in helping individuals with employment, even when the person is receiving IPS services. Family members may join an IPS specialist and job seeker to talk about good job matches, they may meet with the job seeker and a benefits planner to learn how benefits would be affected by employment, they may attend meetings to discuss school and career planning, or they may share their ideas about what job supports would be helpful.

To support family members to engage and participate in IPS, in this packet you will find:

- A letter from an IPS Family & Peer Advocates Committee member,
- A brief description of IPS services,
- A handout on what benefits planning is and where to obtain it,
- Handouts describing how family members can be involved in IPS services,
- Testimonials from people with lived experience about employment, and
- *Work is Recovery* document.

Please share this packet with NAMI chapter members. IPS may not be available in every area. To learn about IPS where you live, contact:

Name:  
Workplace:  
Email:  
Phone:

Sincerely,

*IPS Family & Peer Advocates Committee*  
The International IPS Learning Community  
<https://IPSworks.org>



Hello, I am Warren Taylor. I am a member of the IPS Family and Peer Advocates Committee. We are volunteer members of the committee, because of our strong belief that family members and other natural support individuals can be a positive and essential support in the IPS employment process.



We have all participated in the process for our loved one. We were contacted by the IPS Employment Specialist and asked to participate in the process. Our participation involved as much or as little as we could provide. I was able to build a rapport with the IPS Specialist and explore ways I could assist. For example, I was able to provide transportation to and from work for our loved one. The transportation gave the IPS Specialist a positive factor to offer potential employers.

Our loved one has been working for over 25 years now.

I encourage family members to become involved with the IPS employment process and assist in any way they can. If you're interested in learning more about how to do this, or if you want to be a part of this committee, please contact Jennie Keleher at [jennie.keleher@nyspi.columbia.edu](mailto:jennie.keleher@nyspi.columbia.edu).

Thank you,

*Warren Taylor*



## **What is IPS?**

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is an evidence-based approach to help individuals who have serious mental illness and/or substance use disorders gain employment they enjoy. Individuals are also helped with school or training related to a career preference.

Multiple research trials of IPS have demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach. We know that about 60% of individuals with mental illness say they want to work. Those who participate in IPS obtain employment sooner, work more hours, earn more income and keep jobs longer than people helped by other methods. However, only about 2% of people saying they want to work have access to IPS.

### **IPS is based on the following 8 core principles:**

#### **1. Job seeker preferences are honored**



Preferences could be related to job types, environment, hours/shifts, whether to disclose personal information at work, ongoing support once a job is obtained, or other factors. Research demonstrates that people keep their jobs twice as long if at least three of their preferences are met.

#### **2. Work Incentives Planning**

IPS participants are offered an opportunity to meet with trained benefits planner to review how work income may impact their entitlements.



### 3. Zero Exclusion



People have access to IPS services regardless of history of legal problems, homelessness, substance use disorders, past problems with employment, mental health issues, or other problems.

### 4. Integrated Employment and Clinical Services

IPS specialists and mental health practitioners/substance abuse treatment providers meet regularly to ensure collaboration in supporting a person's treatment and employment goals.



### 5. Rapid Job Search



Job seekers are not asked to complete pre-vocational groups or assessments before pursuing work. Job searches begin within 30 days of a person beginning IPS services.

## 6. Employer Relationship-Building

IPS specialists make multiple in-person visits to employers to build relationships and learn about their businesses. This is done with a job seeker or on their behalf, depending on the job seeker's preferences.



## 7. Competitive Jobs



Regular jobs at regular wages are pursued. These are jobs that anyone can apply for, regardless of disability status.

## 8. Individualized, Time-Unlimited Supports

Different types of job supports are provided based upon each worker's needs and preferences, and for as long as the person wants and needs them. Then natural supports, such as family members, friends, coworkers, and/or mental health practitioners, provide support for maintaining employment.







## Employment and Benefits

This handout is a brief introduction to resources available to individuals who want to learn how their entitlements will be affected by part or full-time employment. Many individuals and their family members have concerns about how entitlements, like Social Security Disability Income or Medicaid, will be affected by employment. In general, almost everyone can benefit financially by working, but it is wise to obtain individualized information when considering employment. Community Work Incentives Coordinators (see below) are excellent resources for obtaining individualized information about benefits and employment.

More information about benefits planning is available at:

<https://choosework.ssa.gov/library/fact-sheet-benefits-counseling-and-the-path-to-employment>.

**Community Work Incentives Coordinators (CWICs):** CWICs provide free, confidential services to individuals with disabilities who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI), and other benefits, such as housing, SNAP/TANF, etc. CWICs are funded through a Social Security Administration program, Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA). CWICs are not Social Security Administration employees. The best reason to consult with a CWIC is their extensive and ongoing training on this complicated subject. CWICs provide individualized information and can offer “bottom line income” forecasting for different earning scenarios. To find a CWIC near you, visit: <https://www.ssa.gov/work/WIPA.html>

Another way some people access benefits planning is through Vocational Rehabilitation. Every state has a Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency to help individuals return to work. Benefits counseling is typically available through this agency. To find VR locations in your state, go to: <https://rsa.ed.gov/about/states>.

### **Terminology:**

**Entitlements or benefits:** Examples are Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Medicare, Medicaid, Veteran’s Administration benefits, food assistance (SNAP), housing benefits, etc.

**Means-tested benefits:** The amount provided to a beneficiary may be reduced as a person earns more money. Examples of means-tested benefits include SSI, food assistance, and many housing subsidies.

Able Accounts: Savings plans for individuals who became disabled before age 46 (as of Jan 2026) and who receive means-tested benefits is at: <https://www.ablenrc.org>.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI):

SSI	SSDI
<b>Supplemental Security Income</b>	<b>Social Security Disability Insurance</b>
SSI is a cash benefit for people with disabilities who have never worked or do not have enough work credits to qualify for SSDI.	SSDI is available to individuals who worked long enough and paid into Social Security and those eligible to claim benefits on a parent's account
\$	\$
\$994 per month for an individual	The benefit amount for SSDI varies based on the claimant's earnings.
\$1491 per month for a couple	

\*These figures are current for 2026

To learn more about SSI or SSDI, visit: <https://www.ssa.gov/redbook/>

**State and local resources:**

Disability Benefits 101 was developed by the World Institute on Disability. DB 101 provides tools and information on employment, health coverage and public benefits. People can use DB101 to plan ahead and learn how income from employment will impact their benefits. Some states (Alaska, California, Colorado, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri and Ohio) have partnered with DB101 to develop detailed information relevant to their local policies. To learn more, go to: <https://www.db101.org>

**The financial outcomes of working and earning an income are far greater than simply receiving SSI/SSDI and other benefits. Recipients of SSI/SSDI live at the poverty level, and research has shown that less than 1% leave the disability rolls due to working. Regardless of whether a person is employed and still receiving some of their Social Security income, or they earn too much money from their job to continue receiving Social Security benefits, they are likely to bring in more money by working. Additionally, working people experience greater overall health and wellness, increased socialization with others, less reliance upon mental health treatment systems and increased independence.**



## Practical Ways to Be Involved in IPS Supported Employment

- ✓ **Learn** about how employment can be part of mental health treatment and how employment helps with recovery, stabilization, housing, physical health, improved self-esteem, and other important quality of life goals. Visit [Family and Peer Advocates – The IPS Employment Center](#)
- ✓ **Ask** about peer positions available with local programs. Increasingly, peers are being incorporated into IPS teams, improving engagement with participants, addressing wellness issues, instilling hope and supporting people's employment goals and job maintenance.
- ✓ **Support** programs in your area, for example, participate in an IPS Steering Committee with your local program or statewide entity.
- ✓ **Contact** local IPS Supported Employment program staff to learn how to be more involved and supportive of your loved one's employment efforts.
- ✓ **Mentor** and support individuals and family members. Share information that you have (for example, information from this packet).
- ✓ **Share** contact information for community employers that you may know and job openings you learn about.
- ✓ **Educate yourself** on benefits and work incentives. Many people fear losing SSI or SSDI when they start working. Encourage your loved one to talk with a benefits counselor or work incentives planner about their individual situation and how much they might bring in with an earned income— this helps them make informed decisions. Ask if they would be ok with you joining those conversations, as well. You can learn together about programs like **Ticket to Work** ([The Work Site | SSA](#)) or the **Plan to Achieve Self-Support** ([Plan to Achieve Self-Support \(PASS\) | Disability Research | SSA](#)) that protect benefits while working, and the resources available through the ABLE Act ([Disability Savings Account | ABLE Account | Eligibility Quiz & News | ABLEnow](#)).



- ✓ **Teach** others about IPS Supported Employment through Family-to-Family and word of mouth. Help your local NAMI chapter ([Find Your Local NAMI | National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#)) with IPS booths at conferences and presentations about recovery through employment.
- ✓ **Advocate** at the local, state, and national level for Supported Employment
  - Local & state legislative advocacy
  - Local mental health agency & state agency advocacy
  - Speak up in meetings about Supported Employment (ask questions, tell success stories, share ideas)
- ✓ **Write** about the importance of IPS Supported Employment in newsletters, emails, and other public forums. Share successes, information about new programs and IPS on social media.

For questions or more ideas, please contact:  
[Program name, POC and contact information]

## Employment Perspectives of People with Lived Experiences



My son worked in a factory for years. We didn't realize that he had issues, but he quit his job because of his mental health problems. He tried to get disability benefits, but his application was turned down, so he started to look for another job. His IPS specialist provided him with inspiration, helped him follow up on job leads, and has been a great support person. My son loves his new job and only wishes he had more hours. He says he is finally doing something that benefits someone else. He has been working with teenagers who have physical and emotional difficulties for four years. He helps them find work and he supports them on the job by teaching them their job duties. And he encourages the young workers. For example, a manager told a young person that he had to finish his job in four minutes, but my son told the young person to just do his best.

I talked with my son's IPS specialist now and then. He would ask what I think, and if I had concerns, I would say so. An example was that there was a job that was far away, and I worried about him traveling that far, but it all worked out.

I think work is good for my son. It gives him purpose. He has something to do, and he enjoys what he does.

I have been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder. I've had trouble with alcohol and suicidal thoughts and attempts. One year I was in and out of the hospital 14 times!

A couple of years ago I came back to Oregon because this is where my family is. Since I've been here, I've been feeling better. I started to think that I needed to do something else besides sitting in my apartment. In September I saw an ad in the paper for a part-time dog groomer, and I called them. They asked me to come in and try out grooming a couple of dogs. The owner liked my work and hired me on a part-time basis.

Now I'm working with Jeff (employment specialist) to get a Pass Plan from Social Security so that I can earn extra money while I start my own dog grooming businesses. We're also working with a small business specialist from the local college to put together a business plan.

I feel more satisfied and fulfilled with my life. It takes my mind off my disability and gives me a chance to be with people. I enjoy working with customers and educating customers about their dogs.

Before Janice got her job at a catering company about one year ago, she hadn't worked in 20 years. Now she has a job that she loves, "I tell my boss that I like working for him. I come in not because I have to, but because I want to."

When Janice first began working, she had fears that the building would blow away. Her employment specialist worked with her supervisor and co-workers so that they would reassure Janice that she was safe. Her mental health team and group home providers also provided supports by making changes to her medications and helping with intrusive thoughts.

Now Janice is a valued employee. Her co-workers asked her to stay and have lunch with them after she finished her shift, but Janice declined the offer saying that she ought to get home. So, her co-workers tried moving their lunchtime back to noon, and eventually to 11:00AM so that lunch would occur in the middle of Janice's work shift. Now Janice eats with them each day she works. "I love working with them. They hustle around and do their thing. I want to work. I want to feel handy and wanted and needed. So, I guess I'll keep on trucking!

If it hadn't been for everyone who helped my son since he was released from jail, he wouldn't be the person he is today. Before he became employed, he sat around the house moping. Mental health treatment has helped him and having a job has been tremendous. Working a job is all my son talked about. Employment has given him independence, and he feels successful because he has a job.

In the beginning, his IPS specialist drove him to job interviews because he didn't have a car. The factory that hired him was willing to work with his schedule for meeting doctors and nurses. When he got the job, his grandmother helped him get a car and he paid her back when he was working.

After the company shut down, he got laid off, but he went out and got a job on his own because he was feeling more confident. He is mechanically inclined and has been all his life. His current job is to build trailers for hauling cars and tractors.

I attended some appointments with my son. It gave me insight into what people were offering to him. I could see that they really wanted him to be successful. I didn't need to worry as much about whether he would be able to work because I could see that he had a team of people who were helping him.

## Work is Recovery: Representative Quotes



### ☐ Increased self-esteem

*"I feel like I have accomplished something pretty cool. I'm shocked – I am more the person I was meant to be."*

### ☐ Better control of psychiatric symptoms

*"I have a new goal to be a dental assistant. I remember when my goal was just to get out of bed."*

### ☐ Reduced criminal justice involvement

*"In the past, I was having trouble by not working. I think I was doing drugs because I had so much free time."*

### ☐ Increased self-sufficiency

*"In the past, people might have used labels to describe me such as 'homeless,' 'mentally ill,' and 'welfare mother.' Now my titles are 'financial administrator,' 'college student,' and 'working mom.'"*

### ☐ Decreased dependence on others

*"Working allows me to get things I need and want and not feel guilty."*

### ☐ Increased connection to community

*"The thing about being unemployed is that I was isolating myself and not getting out in the world. The world picks me up."*

*"Now that I am working, I have something to talk about when I see my family. I can hold my head up because I am paying taxes. I'm part of society again."*

### ☐ Business perspective

*"My supervisor counts on me to be at work on time."*