

APRIL 2026

# CALIFORNIA WORKS

A Newsletter from the IPS Center of Excellence for California



## The New Day Dawns

Diana celebrated seventeen years of recovery and was working for ten years at a grocery store when she relapsed. She found herself homeless and disconnected from her loved ones. Now Diana is picking up the pieces with support from her therapist, psychiatrist, housing staff, and the IPS team in Solano County. In the past, Diana worked to provide for her family. "It was a job." This time, she wants to work at "a job that is best for myself and allows me to be of service to others." Diana would like to become a peer support specialist in helping people understand service options within the behavioral health system or have a similar position in healthcare. Her long term goal is to retire in the helping field. For the time being, Diana is living in a shelter and taking things one day at a time. Each morning, she participates in a recovery group text of 32 people to remind her and others that each new day is a reset. "I work on my recovery daily."

Diana appreciates the support from all the people who walk her journey with her. She is on her way to completing a peer support training program, and she aspires to become employed and serve others. Finally, Diana is hopeful that she will rekindle relationships with her loved ones. "I hope my story will possibly help another person to stay strong, stay focused and thrive."

The IPS Employment Center at Research Foundation for Mental Hygiene, Inc. is proud to serve as the Center of Excellence (COE) for the implementation of Individual Placement and Support (IPS) evidence-based Supported Employment throughout the state of California.

Visit the [Behavioral Health Resource Hub](#) for more information and resources.

Interested in learning more?  
Email us at [IPS.BHCOE@nyspi.columbia.edu](mailto:IPS.BHCOE@nyspi.columbia.edu).  
Our Lead IPS Trainer is available to help!

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"Nevada County [population 102,413] is committed to seeking new ways to help people with serious mental illness find meaningful ways to contribute and thrive in our rural community. Having the opportunity to work can build independence, confidence, and a sense of purpose—while allowing people to use their strengths and pursue what matters to them. In a smaller county, where resources can be limited, we are hopeful IPS will help us offer practical, person-centered support that connects people to real jobs and strengthens their connection to the community."



# IPS Fidelity Reviews for Excellent Outcomes

Yazmin Robledo, Executive Director at Caminar  
Fairfield, CA



IPS was introduced in Solano County in March 2019 through a collaborative effort between Solano County Behavioral Health and the Caminar Jobs Plus Program. Since its implementation, IPS services have demonstrated significant success. Prior to adopting the model, the program served an average of 30 individuals per year; with IPS in place, that number increased to approximately 120 individuals annually. In addition, over 50% of people served by our team work each month.

This growth can largely be attributed to the model's core principles, particularly Zero Exclusion Criteria (every person who wants to work is eligible for IPS services). This approach allowed us to engage participants who had previously been overlooked because they were considered "unstable," "not work ready," or unhoused. By meeting individuals where they are and supporting their employment goals without preconditions, we were able to expand access and provide renewed hope. As a result, we served four times as many individuals and have witnessed meaningful outcomes in participants' lives, including securing housing, purchasing vehicles, and building positive relationships in the workplace.

The Solano Jobs Plus Program has completed two fidelity reviews, each contributing to our development. The first review resulted in a "Fair Fidelity" rating, which highlighted areas for growth and deepened our understanding of IPS framework. Our second review improved to a "Good Fidelity" rating, reflecting our commitment to strengthening service quality and program effectiveness.

Overall, the experience of undergoing fidelity reviews and refining our practices has strengthened our ability to deliver high-quality services. It has also reinforced the importance of cultivating strong employer partnerships and developing meaningful connections with each participant's support system, both of which are essential to long-term success.

## The Importance of Benefits Counseling for Job Seekers

Rebecca Gealta is credentialed benefits planner at Momentum for Health located in San Jose, CA. Approximately three years ago the agency was awarded a Stanford Grant that paid for three staff members to complete the Yang-Tan Institute's (YTI) benefits counseling program through Cornell University. By completing this course, Rebecca became credentialed as a Work Incentives Practitioner (WIP-C). She reports that not only did the course help her to understand how employment impacts Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI), but how and when to apply for work incentives. The course also trained her to assist people receiving other federal programs including housing, Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF), Worker's Compensation, and veteran's benefits.

Rebecca had previously been an IPS specialist and was motivated to take the training because she frequently received questions about benefits, particularly from clients receiving SSI. As a WIP-C, Rebecca attends the weekly vocational unit meetings and receives referrals from the IPS specialists. By being onsite with the IPS team, Rebecca can help job seekers access benefits information quickly when they are interested in work. Rebecca also provides guidance to workers about how to report earnings to Social Security Administration, and she ensures that they understand the consequences for not reporting income.

For those considering the WIP-C course Rebecca explained, "It's rigorous. Expect it to be like a college course. At one point I even considered dropping out, but my supervisor encouraged me to continue." She found the final written exam intimidating--the exam involved meeting with a job seeker and submitting their entire benefits plan. But as a result of her exam, the job seeker obtained employment that allowed him to keep his benefits. He worked during his extended period of eligibility after his trial work months ended. At that point he made enough money to exceed Substantial Gainful Employment (SGA) so that he no longer needed his cash benefits, yet he retained his medical benefits.

Rebecca recommends [Cornell University's YTI](#) course to become a certified Work Incentives Practitioner (WIP-C) to other IPS specialists. And she points out that some job seekers may enjoy a course titled [Benefits to Independence 101](#).

To learn about a tax-free saving account available to cover qualified disability expenses, please visit: <https://www.ablenrc.org>

# Upcoming Events

We've scheduled several calls to help as you begin IPS implementation. Remember to visit the [IPS COE webpage](#) for more details.

Event	Dates
<p><b>Office Hours</b> County and Behavioral Health program staff are invited to join in the open office hours for IPS. An experienced IPS Implementation Specialist will be on hand to talk about IPS and California implementation. All questions welcome!</p>	<p>Every Monday at 1:00 PM PST Every Wednesday at 9:00 AM PST <a href="#">Join Office Hours here</a></p>
<p><b>IPS 101</b> These virtual trainings explore the 8 practice principles of IPS Supported Employment.</p>	<p>To find out more, please <a href="#">click here</a>. All starting at 1 PM PST and will conclude by 2:30 PM PST. Every other Wednesday:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May 13, 2026</li> <li>• May 27, 2026</li> <li>• June 10, 2026</li> </ul>
<p><b>IPS 101 - Administrators</b> These one hour virtual trainings will help with IPS implementation planning and includes a plan building exercise! All county and behavioral health administrators are welcome!</p>	<p><a href="#">Click here</a> for Zoom link.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May 20, 2026 at 10 AM PST - Early IPS Implementation</li> <li>• June 17, 2026 at 10 AM PST - IPS Data Visualization</li> </ul>
<p><b>CA IPS Supervisors</b> These calls will focus on topics specific to the role of the supervisor, including hiring staff, IPS fidelity items, tracking outcomes, developing the team, aspects of supervision, setting goals, engaging with executives, &amp; more.</p>	<p>Second Friday of the month starting at 9 AM PST. <a href="#">Click here</a> for more information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May 8, 2026</li> <li>• June 12, 2026</li> </ul>
<p><b>CA IPS Specialists</b> These calls will focus on topics specific to the role of the specialist, including developing rapport with job seekers, person centered approach, focus on individual strengths, job development, benefits planning, sharing employment and school success stories, &amp; more!</p>	<p>Second Friday of the month starting at 11 AM PST. <a href="#">Click here</a> for more information.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May 8, 2026</li> <li>• June 12, 2026</li> </ul>

## Resources About IPS

Visit [IPSworks.org](https://ipsworks.org) to find resources about IPS and view the [About IPS](#) page to learn about IPS practice principles and research evidence for IPS. Go to the Library tab to watch videos or to download documents about IPS. Examples include a tip sheet for using the Career Profile and a document that describes IPS steering committees.

If the IPS COE is able to plan a statewide steering committee, that will be announced on the website.

Finally, go to the tab titled [IPS in California](#) to find resources developed for California including the following:

- Social media videos of IPS specialists talking about their jobs, IPS consumers explaining why work is important to them, and more. Use the dropdown menu to select Testimonials and be sure to like and share!
- Training videos on subjects such as helping people with legal system impact who want to work.
- Program forms (and the IPS Fidelity scale) in English & Spanish. **Coming soon:** Mandarin, and Tagalog.

# The Common Bond: State Vocational Rehabilitation and IPS Programs

Over a century ago, the National Civilian Vocational Rehabilitation Act became a law on June 2, 1920. Over the years, the Rehabilitation Act has evolved along with different reauthorizations. At present, the core mandate is to assist eligible individuals with disabilities in obtaining and maintaining competitive integrated employment related to each person's strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capacities, interests, and informed choice. Individuals must have a physical or mental impairment that constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment and can benefit in an employment outcome from vocational rehabilitation services.

When the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) supported employment approach was introduced in the early 1990s, the model developers and researchers capitalized on the expertise of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) system. For example, it is known that there are people with mental illnesses who have comorbid conditions including physical, neurological, sensory, and more. This poses a challenge to the mental health system when their expertise is focused on mental illnesses. The VR system is knowledgeable of different disabling conditions that impact a person's employment needs and resources. VR counselors are in a better position to share possible job accommodations and technology that people may need to be successful at work.

VR counselors have large caseloads that make it challenging to provide direct services to eligible individuals who have mental illnesses. In many states VR collaborates with, and has funding mechanisms for, IPS programs to provide individualized services. VR counselors connect regularly and intentionally with IPS programs.

In summary, VR can provide services that are not traditionally provided by the mental health agency and/or IPS supported employment programs. In many areas, VR counselors and IPS programs collaborate to give people the best resources and opportunities that each has to offer. This is a win-win for all entities and particularly for the person who wants to work.

## IPS Supported Employment Fidelity

The IPS Supported Employment Fidelity Scale is divided into three sections: Staffing, Organization, and Services.

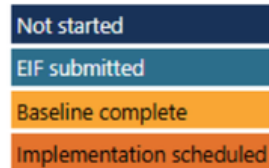
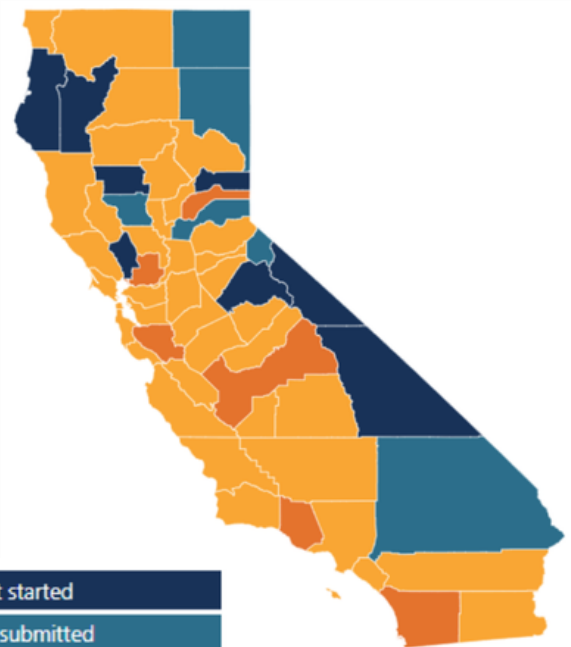
There is a total of 25 items on the scale. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (no implementation) to 5 (full implementation), with intermediate numbers representing progressively greater degrees of implementation. The response alternatives are behaviorally anchored, identifying measurable elements of the practice.

Programs that cannot implement every item on the scale will have some latitude because none of the items can be scored a zero. That means that before the fidelity review begins, every program has a score of 25 points. California programs must reach a score of 80 (fair fidelity) at their first fidelity review, and a score of 100 (full fidelity) by June 30, 2029. We recommend that programs begin implementation soon so that they will have time to reach full fidelity. The IPS Employment Center is happy to review the scale with programs as they begin training, and to help counties and programs plan services to obtain the best possible fidelity to the IPS approach.

***What is most important is that programs that fully implement IPS according to the scale criteria have shown to have higher competitive employment rates than those that do not. Fidelity is a way to ensure that most people find competitive jobs that they enjoy.***

Download the IPS Fidelity Scale in English [here](#). To view and download the Spanish version, please [click here](#).

The IPS COE is delighted to start working with counties across California. Activities to date include county consultation, implementation planning, program interviews, kick-off trainings, and ongoing trainings and technical assistance. Most importantly, people in the IPS programs are starting to get jobs!



## Rural IPS Perceived Barriers and Suggestions

<i>Perceived Barriers to Rural IPS</i>	<i>Strategies or Information That May be Helpful to Overcome Barriers to IPS</i>
Few Jobs Are Available in Small Communities	Explore online, remote, and work at home options. Meet every business manager in the area. Job develop where people can commute to work. Join local business groups, such as local chambers of commerce.
Transportation is Difficult for Job Seekers in Rural Towns	Brainstorm as many methods as possible for transportation. Ask a DOR counselor In a rural area to describe how their clients have been able to commute to work. Collaborate with community partners who provide rides, for example, senior ride services. Consider rideshare account development for new jobs. <b>Suggest any of the following:</b> Ride a bike to work. Pay a coworker gas money for rides. Start up a small business to work from home. Save for a car through PASS Plans or ABLE accounts. Ask a family member for short-term assistance.
Rural IPS Programs Struggle to Achieve Good Fidelity Scores	<b>FACT:</b> Rural IPS programs scored better on average than urban programs. Check out the ASPIRE Brief in link- <a href="#">Implementing Individual Placement and Support in Rural Communities</a> . The IPS Center of Excellence is available to help rural IPS programs.
Employment Outcomes May Be Lower in Rural IPS Programs	Two studies found that rural programs produce the same employment outcomes as urban programs. IPS Specialists who spend time in the community job developing tend to higher employment outcomes in both urban and rural areas.
Some Employers May Have Stigma or Misperceptions about Mental Illness	IPS staff may get to know about businesses and what matters to the owners and managers. Then they match those preferences with strengths of potential job seekers. IPS staff have opportunities to change perceptions about people in recovery. Strategies include sharing positive stories about IPS, ensuring the community hears from working people, asking board members to be ambassadors, and involving prominent employers on the IPS steering committee.
Rural Behavioral Health Programs May Have Funding and Resource Limitations	Consider sources of start-up funds for programs when resources are available. Emphasize the value of employment as a social determinant of health. Consider starting with a smaller IPS team that can expand as funding and referrals to IPS services increases.
Lack of Internet Connectivity and Technology Access Are Common	Explore the local community resources for internet access. Look for partners in the community who provide in-home access and provide training on computer basics. Consider future trends towards technology in rural towns.
<i>Some identified advantages of IPS in rural communities include strong community ties and natural supports, local knowledge and relationships, a sense of shared responsibility lower volume of people needing services, better integration between mental health, treatment services and IPS services, staff longevity, and IPS program staff access to executive leadership.</i>	

The IPS Employment Center at Research Foundation for Mental Hygiene, Inc.  
Center of Excellence

Have a question or want to learn more? Send us an email. We're here to help.  
Email us at: [IPS.BHCOE@nyspi.columbia.edu](mailto:IPS.BHCOE@nyspi.columbia.edu)

