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CALIFORNIA WORKS

A Newsletter from the IPS Center of Excellence for California



Finding the Right Job Match: A Working Person's Story

In this article, Jenny describes how she is learning more about herself as a worker with each job experience. Tania is Jennie's IPS specialist.

Q: Please share a little about what led you to IPS services?

A: "I've always struggled with my mental health." Jenny went on to describe her experience with different service providers that didn't feel like the right fit until she received a new diagnosis and started with her new treatment team. They quickly referred her to an IPS team after she expressed interest in work and explained that she felt better when working. Jenny described being excited about the opportunity to pursue employment as part of her treatment. "I used to assume that a mental health diagnosis meant living on disability, but I want to avoid going on benefits."

Continue reading on **page 4**.

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.
Our Lead IPS Trainer is available to help!

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Implement Now to Help IPS Programs Reach Full Fidelity!

IPS programs in counties with populations above 200,000 must achieve full fidelity by June 30, 2029.

Programs will be better able to attain that goal when they have more time to work on implementing IPS practices. Further, IPS trainers may be more readily available early in this project. Consider implementing now for the best results.

Counties may contact [Crystal McMahon](#) to plan IPS training.



Do Community-based Services Make a Difference

An interview with the Santa Barbara County IPS Team:

Elizabeth Chavez De Perez, Giselle Nava-Benitez, and Eliazar “Eli” Alfaro

The group discussed the benefits of meeting with participants in community locations rather than in office settings. Eli said, “When I meet with participants in the office it seems to constrict on the conversation, whereas meetings in the community opens up a world of possibilities. It also provides a more complete picture of participants’ true personality and allows for better rapport building in a relaxed environment.” Elizabeth noted that, “Meeting near participants’ homes reduces barriers to attendance and creates opportunities for discovering new career interests in natural settings.” Being in the community has also helped her to find employment-related resources for participants including interview clothing and low-cost haircuts. The team shared that when people do come to the office to meet with partitioners, they will offer to give them a ride home or suggest that they go out to visit businesses after their mental health practitioner appointment.



When it comes to face-to-face meetings with employers, Giselle explained, “In-person meetings allow for genuine connections with employers and hiring managers through shared interests and natural conversation.” Eli agreed and stated that he likes to notice what a manager has in their office such as sports memorabilia so he can make a comment that causes a connection. “Plus, it shows that I’m reliable and serious about building a relationship because I make the extra effort to go to the worksite rather than picking up a phone.” Elizabeth added that by visiting businesses in person you can observe workplace dress codes and employee interactions to help assess if a participant would fit the company culture.

The team all agreed that in order to work efficiently in the community IPS specialists need laptops, cell phones, brochures, portable chargers and access to tools including interview questions to help participants practice, the Career Profile, and sample questions to ask a list of employers.

FIDELITY ISSUE SPOTLIGHT

IPS & Concurrent Vocational Programs Within the Same Agency

IPS Fidelity Reviewers find that agencies running concurrent vocational programs may be impacted by implicit referral bias based on a clinician’s beliefs about the likelihood of competitive employment success. For example, people viewed as “employable” may be referred to IPS and those who need a higher level of support in developing soft skills or managing symptoms, may be referred to prevocational programs, groups, or transitional/sheltered employment. Waiting lists, prevocational work or stepwise employment experiences leading up to Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE), and noncompetitive work in agency-run businesses or wellness centers positions set aside for individuals with disabilities are all issues that may impact fidelity adherence.

Visit our [website](#) to read more about IPS and concurrent vocational programs.

Upcoming Events

Visit the [IPS COE webpage](#) for more details.

Event	Dates
Office Hours 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!	Every Wednesday at 3:00 PM PST Join Office Hours here
IPS 101 These virtual trainings explore the eight practice principles of IPS Supported Employment.	To find out more, please click here . All starting at 1 PM PST and will conclude by 2:30 PM PST. Every other Wednesday: - September 16, 23, 30 - October 7, 14, 21, 28 - November 4, 11, 18, 24
IPS 101 - Administrators 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.	Click here for Zoom link. Trainings will be held form 9:00 AM - 10:00 AM PST. - September 17 - Data Visualizations - October 15 - Leadership for Zero Exclusion - November 19 - IPS Success Stories - December 17 - Supervision for IPS Supervisors
Fidelity Scale Overview Each week several items for the IPS fidelity scale will be reviewed. The content is different each week, and the series will repeat when the 25 scale items have been discussed. All sessions are open to be joined.	To view the topic for the week and Zoom link, please visit the website . - September 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 - October 7, 14, 21
CA IPS Supervisors 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 executive leaders, & more.	Third Thursday of the month starting at 1:00 PM PST. Click here for more information. - October 15 - Outcome Based Goals - November 19 - Job Development and Field Monitoring - December 17 - IPS Individual Supervision
CA IPS Specialists These calls will focus on topics specific to the role of the specialist, including developing rapport with job seekers, person centered approach, focusing on individual strengths, job development, benefits planning, sharing employment and school success stories, & more!	Third Thursday of the month starting at 3:00 PM PST. Click here for more information. - October 15 - Accommodations - November 19 - Benefits Planning - December 17 - Supported Education
IPS for Mental Health Practitioners These webinars will focus on the IPS approach, employment as a social determinant of health, how to help individuals consider employment, and the role of mental health practitioners in IPS. All Mental Health Practitioners are welcome!	Last Monday of each month, starting at 10:00 AM PST. Join calls here .

More of Jenny's Interview

Q: What's it been like working with your IPS specialist Tania? What type of support have you gotten?

A: "Working with Tania felt supportive. She smiled a lot and shared ideas and resources so that it felt like something was going to happen." Jenny appreciates the flexibility of scheduling with Tania and especially enjoys meeting in the community. Jenny and Tania have worked with each other on her résumé, doing her first mock interview (something she now encourages her peers to do), and meeting with employers, then following up with them. Jenny described how her mom has been a great person to talk to about her job searching as well as her therapist. ***The integrated support of her mental health team has really worked and made her feel encouraged.*** "I've honestly never heard of anything like it". She also has gotten a lot of support around moving on from a recent job.

**JENNY DESCRIBED
BEING EXCITED
ABOUT THE
OPPORTUNITY TO
PURSUE
EMPLOYMENT AS
PART OF HER
TREATMENT.**

Q: Tell me about your recent job?

A: Jenny and Tania connected with a local casino and hotel initially at a job fair and then followed up. Jenny was hired as a Room Attendant. "I had not worked consistently in over a year and was anxious about working again." However, after Jenny began working she realized the overnights and solo work were not as good a fit as she thought they would be and she felt overwhelmed. At first Jenny was nervous about telling Tania she wanted to leave the job, but Tania's response was for her to do what was right for herself. "For people like me it makes a humongous difference to be told someone will stay working with them even if things don't work out." Jenny reflected it was the first time she didn't feel negatively about herself for leaving a job. She is already interviewing for new roles that suit her new understanding of what she wants. She emphasized that the structured and individualized nature of their appointments gives her a sense of safety and motivation when thinking about finding a new job. "I'm not agitated, I'm excited!". She just completed an interview for a parts delivery position that she feels positive about. "It felt great to have Tania be genuinely excited to hear about my interview."

Q: What are your goals now?

A: "I want stability." Jenny has identified her need for a work environment where team culture is important but does not extend to socializing outside of work. She shared that Tania has helped her reflect on her work preferences based on her past and recent work experience. ***"It feels good to apply for jobs I may not have considered before."***

Q: What advice would you give to someone thinking about employment?

A: "Find the right support that works for you. There is something or someone out there to help you."

Q: What would you want an IPS Specialist to know?

A: "Being spoken 'to' and not 'at' goes a long way. We carry it in our heads". Jenny really wants IPS Specialists to remember that their participants are people and that "having humility and a smile goes a long way".

Boosting Job Development with the Help of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

IPS prioritizes in-person service delivery, including meeting with participants, connecting with service partners, and of course, contacting employers. As AI, such as ChatGPT or Microsoft Copilot, become widely used, IPS specialists can use them to enhance effectiveness and efficiency of job development without sacrificing the critical aspect of in-person relationship development with employers.

When using AI to support job development efforts, proceed with caution. Follow all policies and regulations set by your agency. AI is a tool to expand possibilities for program participants, helping them learn about different jobs in their community. AI searches should never include personal health or identifying information about participants or their mental health agency or other service providers. In addition to the legal and ethical issues this would raise, sensitive information is not needed in order to gather robust employer information to use in a job search.

IPS Specialists target employers according to what participants want to do for work, their strengths, and their preferences. Sometimes, it's difficult to do that in an efficient manner, especially in large urban, or expansive rural areas. AI can help find employers that match a person's interests or scan job boards and online sites to provide current relevant job postings. Some tips for taking advantage of this functionality are:

- Keep prompts general and professional. For example, "Provide 10 healthcare employers with entry-level roles within 10 miles of [ZIP code]."
- Avoid entering any protected or identifying information. No job seeker names, case details, agency data, or protected, sensitive information should be entered under any circumstances.
- Customize outputs. AI-generated employer lists should be reviewed and tailored to the client's goals, strengths, and preferences by the IPS specialist.
- Document appropriately. If AI tools are used, document the outcome (e.g., employer leads generated), not the AI interaction itself.
- Always verify job listings and employer details. Cross-check information directly on the employer's website to ensure accuracy and timeliness.
- Use 'temporary chat' or equivalent privacy settings. This reduces the likelihood of conversations being saved or used for model improvement.

IPS specialists can further explore whether an employer could be a good match for someone, and plan job development outings, by using Google Maps. AI updates to this online tool incorporate real-time traffic information and support route planning. Google My Maps allows for the creation of custom maps. These tools together can help specialists determine employer locations and whether they are in accessible and safe parts of town, distances from a job seeker's zip code or general area (do not enter job seeker addresses), and transportation considerations, such as proximity to bus routes. Google My Maps can be used to plan out a specialist's route to meet with several employers in one day, thus maximizing their community time.

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.*

Remember: It is critical to meet hiring managers in person and learn about their businesses as part of the IPS job development process, even if you've found an employer who has advertised positions. AI can support the identification of potential employer matches, but the IPS specialist must still follow up with their knowledge of the job seeker, create a relationship with the employer, and determine if it really could be a good fit.

Special thanks to Phil Thomas and Chanel Weathers for writing this article.

Building Confidence with Job Development

IPS specialists develop relationships with employers through multiple visits aimed at learning about the workplace and the manager or owner's hiring preferences. Specialists visit employers based upon the interests of the job seekers they serve, but when workplaces do not seem to be a good match for a job seeker, the IPS specialist may elect not to pursue that relationship. Using this approach, the IPS specialist considers the business needs and preferences of both the employer and the job seeker.

Initially, some IPS specialists feel nervous about meeting employers and asking for a short appointment. But overtime they become more confident as they realize that their best sales technique is using good listening skills. And they also learn that employers value the resources that they offer including their reliability, introductions to the right job seeker for their business, and long-term supports for workers. Below are tips for building confidence for engaging employers.

1. Lead with Curiosity Rather Than a Hard Pitch:

Low confidence often stems from the fear of needing to present a flawless, high-pressure sales pitch. By replacing pitch-driven scripts with authentic curiosity, the specialist approaches business owners not as a salesperson, but as a local workforce resource. Curiosity invites dialogue and builds trust naturally. And curiosity allows the specialist to gather important information for job matching so that they can be a resource for the employer.

2. Anchor Outreach in Advocacy for Both Parties:

For an IPS specialist struggling with self-doubt, outreach should never feel like cold calling or self-promotion. When the specialist shifts their internal focus from personal performance to helping the employer understand why a job seeker is a good match for the business, the pressure drops because they are providing a valuable service to both people.

3. Overcome Hesitancy Through Goal Setting:

Sustaining the IPS standard of six or more employer contacts per week requires decoupling daily effort from immediate outcomes. When specialists measure success strictly by job offers, hesitation and fear of rejection grow. Recognizing that every contact with an employer yields valuable community data transforms outreach into a manageable routine.

4. Build Competence Through Shadowing and Collaborative Practice:

Joint employer visits allow the specialist to observe experienced colleagues navigate employer interactions. And role playing common employer responses in a supportive team environment lowers anxiety, and equips the specialist with authentic responses.

5. Cultivate Persistence and Determination:

Job development is rarely a one-time conversation—it is a continuous process of relationship building that relies on steady persistence and follow through. When an IPS specialist receives a business card and is asked to call back later, these moments are opportunities rather than dead ends. A consistent, reliable presence builds trust over time and ensures that when the right opportunity opens up, the specialist is the first person the employer thinks of calling.

Highlight of an Effective IPS Specialist

Dunia Saleh, Alameda County Behavioral Health Department, not only has an excellent record for helping people start jobs related to their interests, she also has helped eight people with education during the past year. Below, she shares her approach to assisting job seekers with their goals and careers.



What training was most helpful in becoming a successful IPS Specialist?

I found field mentoring in job development very helpful. Martin Pacheco first went with me to demonstrate how to facilitate employer meetings. I observed the strategies and success stories he told and also found his tips to be helpful. Now I approach job development the same way I approach job seekers--with curiosity and authenticity. I try to understand the challenges the employers are facing. I want to thoughtfully match the job seeker to the right employers. When I represent job seekers., I focus on their abilities, strengths, skills, and interests.

What do you think new IPS specialists most need to hear/learn to help them feel confident about making employer contacts? Believe in job seekers, even before they believe in themselves. Don't assume what a person can or cannot do. Stay curious, ask questions, and get to know the person well. Some of the most successful job matches came about because we looked beyond perceived limitations and towards each person's strengths and goals. Lastly, don't rely on easily obtainable positions but focus on each job seeker's dreams for themselves.

Were there moments of doubt? If so, how did you overcome those? There was a person who was hesitant to answer questions, and they did not like questionnaires and intakes. I wondered how to complete the paperwork with care and compassion, rather than focusing on the forms. I attend to body language and make sure people feel seen, heard, and genuinely listened to. If I can connect well in the first meeting, it will go well.

What are some of your most effective strategies when it comes to job development? I normalize setbacks; rejections are a part of everyone's employment journey. One interview or one "no" does not define your future. I focus on job seeker strengths and identify employers, based on their strengths, interests and hobbies.

What keeps you coming to work each day? I want to empower each person to reach their goals. Celebrating success and wins is a huge part of why I show up to work. People can exceed their own expectations, complete GEDS, and meet their own goals. Each story is unique. Accepting and helping each person and seeing people later on and knowing I supported them is uplifting.

The IPS Supported Employment Fidelity Scale

Please take advantage of the following opportunities to understand the [IPS Supported Employment Fidelity Scale](#).

- A [two-part recorded webinar](#) is available. In these recordings, Sandy Reese and Sarah Swanson discuss items on the scale by identifying the purpose of each item, how it can be implemented, and how fidelity reviewers determine whether the item is not met, partially met, or fully implemented.
- Webinar Series: Each week several items from the IPS fidelity scale are reviewed. These live webinars allow for questions from participants. The content is different each week, and the series will repeat when all 25 scale items have been discussed. [Register Here](#)
- [Data and Record Keeping for Good Fidelity](#)

AFFINITY GROUPS

IPS affinity groups are a collection of individuals formed around shared interests, goals, or a common identity to create safe and connected spaces for IPS practitioners.

The IPS Center facilitates a Zero Exclusion Committee that supports two affinity groups. Our mission is to create a dedicated, supportive space where **Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and/or Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual (LGBTQIA+)** individuals can connect, share experiences, and thrive. IPS program staff, government leaders, IPS trainers or other friends of the learning community are welcome to join a group that matches how they identify themselves. Whether you want to network, discuss shared challenges, or simply find a community of peers, your voice and presence are welcome!

On behalf of the IPS Zero Exclusion Committee, we would like to invite you to participate:

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Affinity Group

3:30 PM -4:30 PM Eastern Time (US)
Every 3 months on the Third Tuesday
November 17, 2026

LGBTQIA+ Affinity Group

11:00 AM Eastern Time (US)
Every 3 months on the Third Tuesday
November 17, 2026

We invite you to join! These groups are entirely voluntary. Please visit our [webpage](#) for more information!

ISSUE BRIEFS

- **Making the Case for IPS Supported Employment:** Employment is part of the recovery process for most people with mental health conditions. [Read more](#) about making the case for IPS Supported Employment, an issue brief prepared by Gary R. Bond, Ph.D.
- **IPS for New Populations** - [This issue brief](#), prepared by Gary R. Bond, Ph.D., updates the research on the effectiveness of IPS for new populations and targeted subgroups within the psychiatric population. The brief focuses on randomized controlled trials (RCTs), which provide the best evidence on effectiveness. The brief includes summaries of findings and recommendations for further research and practice.

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