

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. These issues may impact multiple fidelity items including: Zero Exclusion, On-Going Work-Based Vocational Assessment, Competitive Jobs, Community-Based Services, and Individualized Job Search. In some cases, the item Agency Focus on Competitive Employment is impacted when fiscal or other pressures lead to increased focus on non-IPS programming within an agency.

Additionally, many people who have disabilities require encouragement to try CIE based on previous exclusions, low internal locus of control, and or the impact of "readiness" statements received in clinical or natural support settings. Multiple vocational programs running concurrently may impact self-referral to IPS based on confidence issues. Clinical treatment team members have also reported challenges in identifying what characteristics constitute a "good referral" to one program versus another or believe that someone who has a limited work history needs a prevocational program in order to develop work-related soft skills. This may lead to selective referral behaviors that limit access to IPS.

Fidelity reviewers caution agencies against running concurrent vocational programs because of this complex interplay of factors.

Case Study:

An agency in a northern state had a pre-existing sheltered workshop when administrators decided to also develop an IPS program. When IPS fidelity reviewers visited the agency, they learned that mental health practitioners sometimes referred people to the sheltered workshop instead of IPS because they thought those individuals needed to prepare for a regular job (CIE). Further, staff at the sheltered workshop reported that they referred people to IPS programs only after those individuals demonstrated good attendance, what staff believed was a competitive work speed, and other appropriate workplace behaviors. Fidelity reviewers lowered the score for the item Zero Exclusion Criteria because mental health practitioners were referring people to the sheltered workshop although some wanted competitive work. The reviewers also lowered the score for Ongoing Work-based Assessment because the workshop staff tried to determine when people were ready to work even though research demonstrates that individuals are the best judges of when they're ready to work (people often perform to the expectations in their environment or their desire to keep up with colleagues).