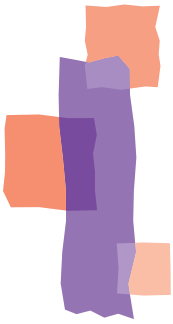

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES KIT

Knowledge Informing Transformation

# Building Your Program

# Supported Employment

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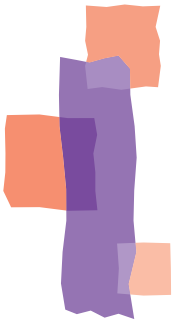

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES KIT

Knowledge Informing Transformation

# Building Your Program

## Supported Employment

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Mental Health Services

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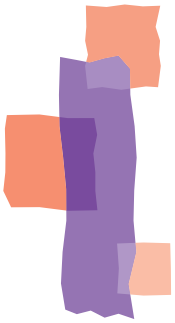


EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES KIT

Knowledge Informing Transformation

# Supported Employment

## Building Your Program

*Building Your Program* is intended to help mental health authorities, agency administrators, and Supported Employment (SE) leaders think through and develop the structure of SE programs. The first part of this booklet gives you background information about the SE model. This section is followed by specific information about your role in implementing and sustaining your SE program. Although you will work closely together to build SE programs, for ease, we separated tips into two sections:

- Tips for Mental Health Authorities; and
- Tips for Agency Administrators and SE Leaders.

In preparing this information, we could think of no one better to advise you than people who have worked successfully with SE programs. Therefore, we based the information in this booklet on the experience of veteran SE leaders and administrators.

For references, see the booklet *The Evidence*.

This KIT is part of a series of Evidence-Based Practices KITs created by the Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

This booklet is part of the Supported Employment KIT that includes a DVD, CD-ROM, and seven booklets:

**How to Use the Evidence-Based Practices KITs**

**Getting Started with Evidence-Based Practices**

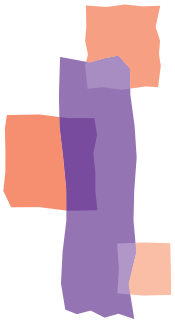
**Building Your Program**

**Training Frontline Staff**

**Evaluating Your Program**

**The Evidence**

**Using Multimedia to Introduce Your EBP**



EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES KIT

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# Supported Employment

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES KIT

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# Building Your Program

## What Is Supported Employment?

People with serious mental illnesses have many strengths, talents, and abilities that are often overlooked, including the ability and motivation to work. Research has shown the following:

- About 70 percent of adults with serious mental illnesses desire work (Mueser et al., 2001; Rogers et al., 2001).
- Consumers and families consistently identify finding and keeping jobs as a top priority.
- Approximately 60 percent of consumers can be successful at working when using SE services (Bond et al., 2001).

Supported Employment (SE) is an approach to vocational rehabilitation for people with serious mental illnesses that emphasizes helping them obtain competitive work in the community and providing the supports necessary to ensure their success in the workplace.

SE programs help consumers find jobs that pay competitive wages in integrated settings (i.e., with other people who don't necessarily have disabilities) in the community.

The overriding philosophy of SE is the belief that every person with a serious mental illness is capable of working competitively in the community if the right kind of job and work environment can be found. Rather than trying to sculpt consumers into becoming "perfect workers" through extensive prevocational assessment and training, consumers are offered help finding and keeping jobs that capitalize on their personal strengths and motivation. Thus, the primary goal of SE is not to change consumers, but to find a natural "fit" between consumers' strengths and experiences and jobs in the community.

In contrast to other approaches to vocational rehabilitation, SE de-emphasizes prevocational assessment and training and puts a premium on rapid job search and attainment. The job search is conducted at a pace that is comfortable for consumers and is not slowed down by any programming prerequisites.

Individuals with serious mental illnesses differ from one another in terms of the types of work they prefer, the nature of the support they want, and the decision about whether to disclose their mental illness to employers or coworkers. SE programs respect these individual preferences and tailor their vocational services accordingly.

In addition to appreciating the importance of consumer preferences, SE programs recognize that most people with serious mental illnesses benefit from long-term support after successfully getting a job. Therefore, SE programs avoid imposing unrealistic time limitations on services, while focusing on helping consumers become as independent and self-reliant as possible.

As consumers succeed in working in the community, their self-perceptions often change, and they view themselves as workers and contributors to society. Furthermore, as people in the community see consumers working, consumers are less stigmatized for their mental illnesses and they become more socially accepted.

SE programs are based on a core set of practice principles. These principles form the foundation of the program.

### Practice Principles of Supported Employment

- Eligibility is based on consumer choice.
- SE services are integrated with comprehensive mental health treatment.
- Competitive employment is the goal.
- Personalized benefits counseling is important.
- Job search starts soon after consumers express interest in working.
- Follow-along supports are continuous.
- Consumer preferences are important.

## Principle 1: Eligibility is based on consumer choice

All consumers who want to participate in SE are eligible—no one is excluded. Consumers who are interested in work are not prevented from participating in SE, regardless of their psychiatric diagnosis, symptoms, work history, or other problems, including substance abuse and cognitive impairment.

The core philosophy of SE is that all consumers can work at competitive jobs in the community without prior training, and no one should be excluded from this opportunity.

SE does not try to bring consumers to some preconceived standard of "work readiness" before they seek employment. Consumers are "work ready" when they say they want to work. Research shows that symptoms, substance abuse, and other consumer factors are not strong and consistent predictors of work when consumers receive assistance from an SE program. Therefore, no justification exists for excluding consumers who are interested in working from SE programs.

## Principle 2: SE services are integrated with comprehensive mental health treatment

Closely coordinating SE services with other mental health rehabilitation and clinical treatment ensures that all mental health practitioners (not just employment specialists) support consumers' vocational goals. For this reason, it is important that

SE staff participate regularly in clinical treatment team meetings.

Participating in team meetings gives you a vehicle to discuss clinical and rehabilitation issues that are relevant to work, including the following:

- Medication side effects;
- Persistent symptoms (e.g., hallucinations);
- Cognitive difficulties; or
- Other rehabilitation needs (e.g., skills training to improve ability to socialize with co-workers or self-assertion skills).

Moreover, regular contact with team members (phone or face-to-face meetings) also allows you to help consumers achieve vocational goals.

## Principle 3: Competitive employment is the goal

SE staff help consumers obtain competitive jobs.

- Competitive jobs are part-time or full-time jobs that exist in the open labor market and pay at least a minimum wage.
- They are jobs that anyone could have regardless of their disability status.

Competitive jobs are not jobs that are set aside for people with disabilities. The wage should not be less than the wage (and level of benefits) paid for the same work performed by people who do not have a mental illness.

Competitive work is valued for several reasons:

- **Consumers express a strong preference for competitive work over jobs that are set aside for consumers.** Consumers want to work in community settings.
- **Competitive work promotes integrating consumers into the community.** Involving consumers in normal activities reduces the stigma of mental illness.
- **Consumers' self-esteem often improves.** As consumers see that they are able to work competitively, that their work is valued, and that they can contribute to society, some consumers experience improvements in symptoms and self-esteem.

Historically, many vocational programs have placed consumers into noncompetitive jobs, often paying subminimum wages, with only rare progression into competitive employment. Experience shows that consumers can successfully work at competitive jobs *without* previously participating in training programs or noncompetitive job experiences.

## Principle 4: Personalized benefits counseling is important

Fear of losing benefits (e.g., Social Security and health insurance) is a major reason that consumers may not seek employment. For this reason, it is vital that consumers who are interested in working obtain accurate information to guide their decisions about work.

While employment specialists should be able to communicate basic information about the impact of work on consumers' benefits, all consumers should have access to benefits counseling when they start SE services and when changes occur in their work status.

## Principle 5: Job search starts soon after consumers express interest in working

Employment specialists are directed to help consumers explore job opportunities within one month after they start the SE program. Rapid job search helps engage consumers in SE services and takes advantage of consumers' current motivation.

Studies show that fewer consumers obtain employment when the job search is delayed by prevocational preparations and requirements. For this reason, it is against SE principles to require

extensive pre-employment assessment and training or intermediate work experiences (like prevocational work units, transitional employment positions, or sheltered workshops).

### Principle 6: Follow-along supports are continuous

Some consumers struggle with symptoms that change or persist over time, so their optimal treatment and rehabilitation require a long-term commitment. For this reason, despite their vocational success, consumers who receive SE services are never terminated unless they directly request it. Follow-along supports are provided to consumers on a time-unlimited basis.

While follow-along supports are continuous, for many consumers the extent of support gradually decreases over time. In fact, the goal for employment specialists is to provide support and assistance while helping consumers become independent.

### Principle 7: Consumer preferences are important

Consumers who obtain work that they find interesting tend to have higher levels of satisfaction with their jobs and longer job tenures. For this reason, consumers' preferences guide all phases of SE services. Honoring consumers' preferences is critical in helping them pursue their vocational goals.

## How do we know that Supported Employment is effective?

The SE model has been the most extensively studied model of vocational rehabilitation for people with serious mental illnesses. Ample evidence supports its effectiveness. A recent review of 17 studies involving employment programs consistently demonstrated that SE programs showed significant advantages over traditional approaches. Across these studies, 58 percent of consumers who were in SE obtained competitive employment compared to 21 percent in traditional programs (Bond et al., 2001).

The SE model has been found to produce better vocational outcomes than the comparison programs, such as prevocational programming, sheltered work, and transitional employment. Specifically, consumers in SE programs were more successful in achieving these goals:

- Obtaining competitive work;
- Working more hours; and
- Earning higher wages (Bond et al., 2001).

Some research shows that when consumers succeed in finding competitive work, improvements may occur in symptoms, self-esteem, and satisfaction with finances (Bond et al, 2001; Mueser et al., 1997). Most consumers in SE programs who obtain employment work part-time and are able to keep their benefits (i.e., Social Security payments, health insurance). Work often becomes a meaningful part of their lives.

## No evidence of negative effects

Practitioners, consumers, and family members are sometimes concerned that competitive work will be a stressful experience that may increase the chances of relapses and rehospitalizations. However, the research on SE has consistently found that no negative effects relate to participating in an SE program. Specifically, consumers who participate in SE programs do not experience more severe symptoms or higher levels of distress, nor do they require more intensive psychiatric treatment such as emergency room visits or psychiatric hospitalizations (Bond et al., 2001).

## Who benefits most from Supported Employment?

Research shows that consumer factors do not predict better employment outcomes. Specifically, employment success has not been linked to any of the following:

- Diagnosis;
- Symptomatology;
- Age;
- Gender;
- Disability status;
- Prior hospitalization;
- Education; or
- Co-occurring condition of substance use (Bond et al, 2001).

Although work history predicts better employment outcomes, SE remains more effective than traditional vocational services for consumers with both good and poor work histories. Consequently, we speculate that the professional assistance that SE programs provide at every stage of the employment process compensates for consumer deficits in a way that less assertive vocational rehabilitation approaches do not.

Some consumer factors have not been systematically examined in the literature. For example, few studies research the effect of employment services for people with serious mental illnesses who are homeless. However, *Work as a Priority* (Shaheen, Williams, & Dennis, 2003) addresses the need for employment services to be coordinated with housing and other services for this population.

The majority of studies were conducted in settings with significant numbers of Caucasian, African American, and Latino consumers (Bond et al., 2001). Although more replications are needed, all the evidence to date suggests that the effectiveness of SE compared to traditional vocational services generalizes to both the African American and Latino populations.

Further research is needed to determine whether SE is equally effective across all ethnic groups. However, anecdotally, we know that culture and language pose significant barriers to providing SE in some populations.

## Where should Supported Employment be provided?

Community characteristics do not appear to impose a major barrier to implementing an SE program. SE has been successfully implemented in both very urban and very rural settings as well as in mid-sized cities in many different states.

Nearly all research on the effectiveness of SE has been conducted in community mental health centers. The extent to which SE can be successfully adapted to other types of agencies is the subject of current research, but no strong conclusions can be drawn now.

## Is Supported Employment cost-effective?

Only limited research has examined the cost of providing SE services. This research shows that when an SE program is added to an existing psychiatric rehabilitation program, overall costs of services (that is, the combined treatment and employment program costs) increase. However, when an SE program replaces another rehabilitation program—such as a day treatment program—the overall treatment costs remain the same.

Assuming a caseload of about 18 consumers per employment specialist, the cost of SE services typically ranges between $2,000 and $3,000 per consumer per year (Clark, 1998; Kregel et al., 2000).

SE programs may either increase overall treatment costs or not affect treatment costs, depending on whether the services are added or substituted for another service in a rehabilitation program.

In summary, many mental health systems and agencies are confronted with the challenge of meeting the needs of consumers in an environment of limited resources. The SE model, an evidence-based practice, is one of the most effective service strategies available, demonstrating consistent, positive outcomes for consumers.

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES KIT

Knowledge Informing Transformation

# Building Your Program

## Tips for Mental Health Authorities

**Successfully implementing evidence-based practices requires the leadership and involvement of mental health authorities. This section discusses why you should be involved in SE implementation and the types of activities that mental health authorities typically undertake.**

### Why should you be interested in Supported Employment?

The Supported Employment (SE) KIT presents public mental health authorities with a unique opportunity to improve clinical services for adults with serious mental illnesses. Research about service systems has evolved to a point where it can identify a cluster of practices that demonstrate a consistent, positive impact on the lives of consumers. This KIT represents one of those evidence-based practices.

The SE KIT makes it possible to give you this evidence-based practice in a comprehensive and easy-to-use format.

### Can SE make a difference?

Whenever new programs come along, administrators have to ask whether it is worth it to reorganize: Is the new program really going to make a difference?

When it comes to SE, extensive research shows that the answer is, "**Yes**." Most

impressive is the extent to which SE has been subjected to rigorous research and the consistency of favorable findings.

Briefly stated, extensive research shows that consumers in SE programs were more successful than consumers in other vocational programs in the following areas:

- Obtaining competitive work;
- Working more hours; and
- Earning higher wages (Bond et al., 2001).

Some research shows that when consumers succeed in finding competitive work, improvements may occur in symptoms, self-esteem, and satisfaction with finances (Bond et al., 2001; Mueser et al., 1997).

For more information, see *The Evidence* in this KIT.

## Aren't we already doing this?

Your mental health system may already provide vocational programs. While these services share some characteristics of SE, important distinctions exist.

SE helps consumers obtain competitive work in the community and provides the supports necessary to ensure success at the workplace. SE programs help consumers find jobs that pay competitive wages in integrated settings (i.e., with others who don't necessarily have a disability) in the community.

SE is based on the following principles:

- Eligibility is based on consumer choice;
- SE services are integrated with comprehensive mental health treatment;
- Competitive employment is the goal;
- Personalized benefits counseling is important;
- Job search starts soon after consumers express interest in working;
- Follow-along supports are continuous; and
- Consumer preferences are important.

## Will SE work in your mental health system?

The SE model has been adapted in community mental health agencies in many states. Studies showing the effectiveness of SE were conducted in settings that included primarily Caucasian, African American, and Latino consumers. However, no evidence suggests that race, gender, geographic setting, age, education, diagnosis, symptomatology, disability status, prior hospitalization, or co-occurring condition of substance abuse are related to consumers' ability to benefit from SE services.

## How can mental health authorities support SE?

As you read about Supported Employment, you may think that it sounds great but unaffordable. We want to challenge that notion because other mental health systems with limited resources are in the process of implementing SE programs system-wide. These systems have visionaries who recognized the benefits of providing this evidence-based practice and who persisted in overcoming challenges.

Implementing SE must be a consolidated effort by agency staff, mental health authorities, consumers, and families. However, for this initiative to be successful, mental health authorities must lead and be involved in developing SE programs in local communities.

## Be involved in implementing Supported Employment

**Step 1** Create a vision by clearly articulating SE principles and goals. Designate a staff person to oversee your SE initiative.

**Step 2** Form advisory groups to build support, plan, and provide feedback for your SE initiative.

**Step 3** Establish program standards that support implementation. Make adherence to those standards part of licensing criteria.

**Step 4** Address financial issues and align incentives to support implementation.

**Step 5** Develop a training structure tailored to the needs of different stakeholders.

**Step 6** Monitor SE fidelity and outcomes to maintain and sustain program effectiveness.

## Create a vision

Agencies commonly set out to implement one program, but end up with something entirely different. Sometimes these variations are intentional, but often they occur for the following reasons:

- One administration starts an initiative and another with a different vision and priorities subsequently assumes leadership;
- The model wasn't clearly understood to begin with; or
- The staff drifted back to doing things in a way that was more familiar and comfortable.

Articulating the vision that people with mental illnesses can work and experience competitive employment is essential to successfully implementing an SE program. Place the SE initiative in the context of the larger recovery paradigm. Articulate how SE programs will help agencies fulfill their mission—assisting consumers in their recovery process.

To ensure that your vision is clearly articulated, designate a staff person who has experience with the SE model to oversee your SE initiative.

## Form advisory groups

You can ensure that the SE model is implemented appropriately if you contractually mandate that stakeholder advisory groups guide the implementation initiative. The development of your SE program can benefit in many ways from forming an advisory group including these:

- Building internal and external support;
- Generating referrals;
- Increasing program visibility; and
- Advising with ongoing planning efforts.

Consider forming local and state-level advisory groups and a Business Advisory Council. State-level advisory groups may include the following:

- Representatives from different state agencies (department of labor, rehabilitation services administration or vocational rehabilitation, Medicaid, and the Social Security Administration) that would be invested in the initiative;
- Stakeholders from the Chamber of Commerce or other business associations;
- Leadership from implementing agencies; and
- Representatives from consumer and family state advocacy organizations.

Involving stakeholders from the Department of Labor, for example, can lead to collaborating with One-Stop Career Centers, which seek to provide integrated employment and training services so that

consumers do not need to go from one place to another to receive information and services.

Involving stakeholders from vocational rehabilitation can help streamline procedures that help generate additional revenue for SE programs. Furthermore, representatives from the Social Security Administration can help you identify resources for benefits counseling and routine training on the impact of work on benefits.

Local advisory groups can serve as liaisons between the community and participating mental health agencies. Community stakeholders with an interest in the success of SE programs include representatives of the following:

- Local consumer organizations;
- Local family organizations;
- Agency administrators; and
- Local vocational rehabilitation agencies.

Additionally, many communities have found it helpful to establish a Business Advisory Council at the local level.

"It has often been said that the employment of people with disabilities is mostly a matter of opportunity and support. The quantity and quality of opportunity, however, depends on how available, interested, and informed employers are. Furthermore, as studies on employer views of disability illustrate, the target of the support should be as much the employer as the job seeker." (Luecking, Fabian, & Tilson, 2004).

Forming a Business Advisory Council will allow you to engage and elicit feedback from local employers. Use the forum to educate employers about the benefits of hiring people with mental illnesses. Inform them of the benefits of a collaborative working relationship including the following components:

- A pool of interested and qualified applicants;
- Prescreening of potential applicants to assess their skills and strengths for available positions;
- Short-term, onsite job coaching to help new employees become situated;
- Guidance about reasonable accommodations; and
- Information about the Work Opportunities Tax Credit that reduces employers' federal income tax liability.

From the beginning, you need to lead your advisory groups in understanding and articulating what SE is and how it is going to be developed in your mental health service system. For training materials that you can use to help stakeholders develop a basic understanding of Supported Employment, see *Using Multimedia to Introduce Your EBP* in this KIT.

Advisory groups should continue to meet well after your SE program has been established. We suggest that they meet about once a month for the first year, once every 2 months for the second year, and quarterly for the third year. By the second and third years, advisory groups may help SE programs sustain high fidelity by assisting with fidelity evaluations, outcomes monitoring, or translating evaluation data into steps for continuous quality improvement. For more information on the role of advisory groups, see *Getting Started with EBPs* in this KIT.

## Planning your SE initiative

With a vision firmly in place, the process of unfolding SE programs across the service system can begin. Carefully planning this process will help ensure a successful outcome.

Implementing SE programs first in pilot or demonstration sites may be useful. Working with pilot sites can help you manage problems as they arise and give constituents the opportunity to see that SE works.

Multiple pilot sites are preferable to just one. When only one site is used, idiosyncratic things

can happen that misrepresent the model. On the other hand, when systems do a system-wide "rollout," it is difficult to adequately train all SE staff. In that case, system problems that may have been resolved easily on a smaller scale with a few SE programs can cause havoc.

## Establish program standards

Studies of agencies that have tried to replicate evidence-based models have found that if agencies did not achieve positive outcomes, it was often because they failed to implement all of model's components (Becker et al., 2001; Bond & Salyers, 2004). As a mental health authority, you have the capacity to ensure that the system has incentives to implement SE. Attention to aligning these incentives in a positive way (such as attaching financial incentives to achieving higher competitive employment rates) is vital to successfully implementing SE.

States have the authority to adopt regulations that govern services to consumers. These regulations set standards for the quality and adequacy of programs, including criteria that govern these areas:

- Admission and discharge;
- Staffing;
- Service components;
- Assessment and treatment planning;
- Consumer medical records;
- Consumer rights; and
- Supervision and program evaluation.

Support the implementation of SE by explicitly referencing SE in licensing standards and other program review documents (for example, grant applications, contracts, requests for proposals, and so forth). It is also important to review current administrative rules and regulations to identify any barriers to implementing SE. Work closely with agency administrators to ensure that mental health authority policies support high-fidelity SE practice.

## Address financial issues

Each state is different. In many cases, while your SE initiative can be mounted with little or no additional appropriations, it is important to review funding streams to ensure that they support SE implementation.

### What does SE cost?

The cost of providing SE services varies from state to state, ranging from $2,000 to $4,000 per consumer per year (Clark, 1998; Kregel et al., 2000). The cost figures vary according to many factors, including the following:

- Severity of disability for consumers served;
- Local wage scales for employment specialists;
- Indirect costs; and
- Costs of clinical services.

### How is SE funded?

Funding mechanisms vary from state to state. For the most part, funds are used from these sources:

- Rehabilitation services administration (or vocational rehabilitation);
- Division of mental health; and
- Medicaid.

Work with leaders from these state agencies to develop a mechanism to pool monies that can be used to reimburse the services of SE programs.

State Medicaid rules may allow reimbursement for selected SE services. Consider contacting administrators from other states who have successfully worked out a plan to gather useful ideas and strategies.

If you determine that additional appropriations are necessary to fund SE services, consider shifting resources from services that have not been scientifically demonstrated to be effective or that consumers desire less.

## Develop a training structure

Agencies who implement evidence-based practices (EBPs) are often stymied in their efforts because people misunderstand the model or lack information. It is important that key stakeholders (consumers, families, and other essential community members) and agency-wide staff develop a basic understanding of SE.

We encourage you to support agency administrators in their efforts to develop a training structure for implementing SE.

- The training plan should include basic training for key community stakeholders, including these people:
  - Consumers;
  - Families;
  - Employers;
  - Mental health authorities; and
  - Staff from key community organizations.
- The training plan should also include basic training for staff at all levels across the agency and intensive training for employment specialists.

### Choose your trainer

You may design an intensive training plan for employment specialists in several different ways, but you must first decide who will conduct the training. SE leaders may facilitate the initial training for employment specialists by using the training tools in *Training Frontline Staff* in this KIT. Some choose to hire external trainers.

One successful strategy in training employment specialists entails having new employment specialists visit an existing, well-functioning, high-fidelity SE program to observe how the program works. New employment specialists will benefit most from this visit if they have a basic understanding of the SE model.

Once trained, SE leaders and employment specialists will be able to use the tools in *Using Multimedia to Introduce Your EBP* in this KIT to provide basic training to key stakeholders.

### Offer ongoing training and consultation

Throughout the first year of your SE program, we encourage you to offer SE staff intermittent booster training sessions. After the first year, consider establishing an annual state-wide conference on SE.

Routine onsite and telephone consultation is also important, particularly for SE leaders. Leading an SE team requires a complex set of administrative and clinical skills. SE leaders provide direct services and supervision, which may require a shift in thinking about consumers' potentials and about how colleagues work together.

SE leaders also have administrative responsibilities such as hiring, preparing administrative reports, and developing policies and procedures. Perhaps more important, SE leaders are responsible for ensuring that the SE program operates with fidelity to the SE model, including ensuring the quality and content of staff-consumer interactions.

Only through day-to-day leadership will the SE model be faithfully carried out. For this reason, it is very difficult for anyone to grasp everything that has to be learned in a brief time. Also, understanding what needs to be done and translating that understanding into action are different and equally difficult.

For at least the first year a new program is in operation, SE leaders need someone who is experienced in SE to provide ongoing consultation on organizational and clinical issues. Consultation ranges from integrating SE principles into the agency's policies and procedures to case consultation.

Some states develop EBP programs in stages so that the first employment specialists can help train those in newly developed programs. Generally, it takes about a year for staff to feel confident providing SE, but this can vary depending on how much structural change is needed. Programs that are not already team oriented or are reluctant to accept new models can take longer to change.

It may take 2 to 3 years for an agency to become sufficiently proficient in the SE model to assume the added responsibility of training other agencies' employment specialists. Agencies that have become SE training sites indicate that involving their staff in training staff from new SE programs reinforces SE principles and knowledge of the SE model. A state- or county-wide coordinator who is experienced with the SE model can also help new SE programs through ongoing contact, assessment, and troubleshooting.

## Monitor SE fidelity and outcomes

Providing SE involves incorporating a new program into the service delivery system. The best way to protect your investment is to make certain that agencies actually provide SE services that positively affect the lives of consumers.

**Programs that adhere more closely to the evidence-based model are more effective.** Adhering to the model is called SE fidelity. The *SE Fidelity Scale* measures how well programs follow key elements of the SE model (Bond et al., 1997). Studies of evidence-based models tell us that the higher an agency scores on a fidelity scale, the greater the likelihood that the agency will achieve favorable consumer outcomes (Bond & Salyers, 2004). For this reason, it is important to monitor both SE fidelity and SE outcomes.

As a central part of the initial planning process, you must address how you will monitor the fidelity and outcomes of SE programs. Too many excellent initiatives had positive beginnings and enthusiastic support but floundered at the end of a year because they did not plan how they would maintain the SE program. Monitoring SE fidelity and outcomes on an ongoing basis is a good way to ensure that your SE programs will continue to grow and develop. Consider developing routine supervision and evaluations of your SE programs. If it is not possible, use strategies (e.g., rules, contracts, financial incentives, etc.) to support fidelity and outcomes monitoring on the local level or within individual agencies.

The characteristics of an SE program that would have a perfect score on the *SE Fidelity Scale* are shown on the next page. For the entire *SE Fidelity Scale*, see *Evaluating Your Program in this KIT*.

| Characteristics of an SE program that would have a perfect score on the *SE Fidelity Scale* | |
|---|---|
| **Caseload** | Employment specialists manage caseloads of up to 25 consumers. |
| **Vocational services staff** | Employment specialists provide only vocational services. |
| **Vocational generalists** | Each employment specialist carries out all phases of vocational service. |
| **Integration of rehabilitation with mental health treatment** | Employment specialists are part of the mental health treatment teams with shared decisionmaking. |
| **Vocational unit** | Employment specialists function as a unit. |
| **Zero-exclusion criteria** | There are no eligibility requirements to enter the SE program. |
| **Ongoing, work-based assessment** | Vocational assessment is an ongoing process. |
| **Rapid search for competitive jobs** | The search for competitive jobs occurs rapidly after program entry. |
| **Individualized job search** | Employer contacts are based on consumers' job preferences. |
| **Diversity of jobs developed** | Employment specialists provide job options that are in different settings. |
| **Permanence of jobs developed** | Employment specialists provide competitive job options that have permanent status. |
| **Jobs as transitions** | Employment specialists help consumers end jobs when appropriate and then find new jobs. |
| **Follow-along supports** | Individualized, follow-along supports are provided to employers and consumers on a time-unlimited basis. |
| **Community-based services** | Vocational services are provided in community settings. |
| **Assertive engagement and outreach** | Employment specialists make multiple contacts with consumers as part of initial engagement and at least monthly on a time-unlimited basis when consumers stop attending vocational services. |

EVIDENCE-BASED PRACTICES KIT

Knowledge Informing Transformation

# Building Your Program

## Tips for Agency Administrators and Supported Employment Leaders

**Whether your agency is interested in enhancing an existing program or developing a new program, you will need a broad range of activities to successfully implement Supported Employment (SE). This section outlines the range of implementation activities in which agency administrators and SE leaders are often involved.**

### Recruit your SE staff

SE programs consist of an SE leader, two or more employment specialists, and a benefits counselor, depending on the number of consumers that the agency plans to serve.

SE leader and employment specialist positions are typically full time. Part-time positions generally do not work out well. As part of their jobs, both employment specialists and SE leaders juggle a variety of tasks and must be dedicated to the work, which is difficult to do on a part-time basis.

In the SE model, SE leaders and employment specialists provide only vocational services. They do not supervise or act as case managers. When they carry out dual responsibilities, they tend to lose their focus on employment and are less effective. Therefore, staff should be dedicated completely to SE.

## Choose an SE leader

It is important to hire or designate a leader for your SE program. We suggest that SE leaders are full-time employees whose time is 100 percent dedicated to the SE program.

SE leaders are often mid-level managers who have the authority to make or suggest administrative changes within the agency. Successful SE leaders have both administrative and clinical skills. As part of their administrative responsibilities, SE leaders undertake the following:

- Hire and train employment specialists;
- Develop SE policies and procedures;
- Act as a liaison with other agency coordinators;
- Manage SE referrals;
- Monitor the program's fidelity to the SE model; and
- Oversee various other quality control and financial responsibilities.

As part of their clinical responsibilities, SE leaders undertake the following:

- Provide SE services;
- Provide weekly group supervision;
- Provide individual supervision as needed; and
- Give program feedback to the SE team.

Below is an example of the SE leader's job description. Since SE leaders must have an active role in setting up the structures and processes needed to support the SE team, we encourage you to make the KIT available to candidates during the hiring process so that they will understand what they must do.

## Select the best employment specialists

The most important characteristic of a good employment specialist is the belief that people with serious mental illnesses who are interested in

**Sample job description for Supported Employment leaders**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Overall function** | Oversees the SE program by supervising employment specialists and being the administrative liaison to other coordinators within the mental health agency |
| **Responsibilities** | ■ Accepts SE referrals and assigns employment specialists to work one-on-one with consumers<br>■ Supervises SE team weekly using case examples and following SE principles and procedures<br>■ Individually supervises employment specialists as needed<br>■ Acts as liaison to other department coordinators in the mental health agency<br>■ Monitors and ensures the integration of the employment specialists with treatment teams<br>■ Provides SE services to small caseload (e.g., fewer than 15 people) |
| **Qualifications** | Master's degree in rehabilitation counseling or related field<br>Previous experience as an employment specialist helping people with serious mental illnesses obtain and sustain competitive employment is desired<br>Previous supervisory experience is desired |

working can obtain competitive jobs and sustain them, if the job is a good match and the right supports are put in place. Some agencies hire employment specialists who go for months without helping consumers find work.

The SE leader may hear the employment specialist say that consumers are not motivated, employers will not hire people with mental illnesses, or high unemployment is the problem. In such cases, employment specialists' doubts may impede consumers' success. To effectively support consumers in obtaining and sustaining employment, employment specialists must wholeheartedly believe that consumers can work.

Success as an employment specialist appears to have less to do with academic credentials and more to do with personal style and philosophy. Positive, high-energy, and enthusiastic people who have a "can do" attitude tend to do well.

As you can see from the sample job description on the next page, the employment specialists' tasks are as varied as the skills needed to complete them. Employment specialists must have these skills:

- Counseling skills;
- Skills to engage consumers and employers;
- Business skills to conduct job searches; and
- Strong interpersonal skills.

Good candidates generally come either from the business community or from positions in vocational rehabilitation services where they have worked very closely with employers. Applicants who have training and experience in vocational programs that use a step-wise approach may not be good candidates since they may reject SE principles such as rapid job search.

Desired qualifications are as follows:

- Knowledge of serious mental illnesses (including treatment, medication, and the impact of mental illnesses on vocational functioning);
- Ability to identify consumers' interests, strengths, skills, abilities, and unique set of challenges and match them with jobs;
- Ability to identify and arrange long-term supports to help consumers keep jobs;
- Ability to advocate effectively for consumers with team members and employers;
- General knowledge and experience in job development and marketing;
- Demonstrated ability to relate positively with employers in the community; and
- Working knowledge of a broad range of occupations and jobs.

Successful employment specialists are typically task-oriented people who are outgoing and assertive and who have the ability to engage all different types of people, including consumers, family members, team members, and employers. Employment specialists must also be able to work both independently and as team members—providing cross-coverage for SE team members and participating in group supervision.

Employment specialists must also enjoy working in the community. Employment specialists spend more than 60 percent of the time in the community developing jobs and providing support to consumers and employers. For this reason, employment specialists should enjoy knocking on doors, talking to people in their community, putting people and ideas together, and doing whatever it takes to help consumers reach their vocational goals.

Hiring employment specialists who have lived in the community and are familiar with the local businesses is helpful for conducting successful job searches.

People who become good employment specialists do not necessarily come to the job with all the above qualifications. Some people can acquire knowledge and skills on the job as long as they are smart and eager to learn. Training and good supervision — along with the lessons learned

| Sample job description for employment specialists | |
|---|---|
| **Overall function** | Carries out SE services by helping consumers obtain and sustain employment that is consistent with their vocational goals and recovery |
| **Responsibilities** | ■ Engages consumers and establishes trusting, collaborative relationships directed toward the goal of competitive employment in integrated job settings<br>■ Assesses consumers' vocational functioning on ongoing basis<br>■ Following SE principles and procedures, helps consumers in job development and job search activities directed toward positions that are consistent with consumers' needs and interests<br>■ Provides individualized, time-unlimited, follow-along services to help consumers sustain employment<br>■ Based on agreement with consumers, provides education and support to employers, which may include negotiating job accommodations and follow-along contact with employers<br>■ Provides outreach services to consumers, as necessary, when they appear to disengage from SE services. If necessary, maintains some contact with consumers even without a vocational focus to sustain engagement<br>■ Meets regularly with treatment team members to coordinate and integrate vocational services into mental health treatment<br>■ Draws up individual employment plans with consumers, case managers, and other treatment team providers and updates the plans quarterly<br>■ Spends at least 60 percent of direct service time in the community to engage and support consumers, family members, and employers<br>■ Carries out other duties as assigned |
| **Qualifications** | Education and experience equivalent to undergraduate degree in mental health or social services, business, personnel management, or vocational services<br>Experience working with people with serious mental illnesses, experience with vocational services, and knowledge of the work world are preferred<br>Ability to work as an effective team player is essential |

through day-to-day experience — help most employment specialists develop the skills and confidence to do a good job.

## Consider hiring a benefits counselor

Historically, practitioners encouraged consumers to limit working to protect their benefits. However, for most consumers a life spent on benefits means a life spent in poverty. In most cases, consumers are better off financially if they work and take advantage of available work incentives. For this reason, it is important that consumers have accurate information to make informed choices.

In general, employment specialists and other practitioners may know that rules govern benefits and earned income. But in most cases, their information is not comprehensive. The rules are complicated and periodically adjusted, making it difficult to keep up to date with the information. This is why many agencies create benefits specialist positions. Benefits specialists have comprehensive information about benefits and work incentives. They meet with consumers who are considering going to work to review their benefits and project how work will affect them. They also provide personalized benefits planning to help consumers manage their benefits and health care coverage as they work more and increase their earnings.

Some evidence shows that consumers who received benefits counseling tend to earn more money than consumers who did not.

If your agency is unable to hire a benefits specialist, look for other ways that consumers can access benefits counseling. For example, the Social Security Administration funds benefits counseling services in all 50 states through the Work Incentives Planning and Assistane (WIPA) projects. Contact your state WIPA project for more information. Visit **DisabilityInfo.gov** or ask your mental health authority for other resources in your area.

### Reflect your community's cultural diversity

SE teams should reflect the cultural diversity of the communities in which they operate. More important, employment specialists must be aware of and sensitive to cultural differences and consumer preferences. SE teams should reflect the cultural diversity of the communities in which they provide services, and they should include bilingual employment specialists as needed.

Having a balance of male and female employment specialists may also be helpful. Your SE program must also have resources available to allow employment specialists to work with consumers who have hearing and visual impairments.

### Consider these hiring tips

You should thoroughly check references for job candidates. The best predictor of work performance is likely to be candidates' performance in previous jobs, particularly jobs that required some of the same skills and personal qualities that are desirable for employment specialists. The SE leader should talk to previous supervisors, ask in detail about candidates' previous work responsibilities and performance, and seek opinions about their capabilities. If candidates have had little experience in the mental health field or have just finished school, you can gather valuable information from field supervisors, training mentors, and teachers.

Invite all candidates who are being seriously considered for employment to spend half a day or more in your SE program so that they can see employment specialists at work firsthand.

Candidates can then better evaluate how well they might fit in and be able to make a more informed decision about taking the job. This visit will also give employment specialists a chance to talk with and observe candidates. Ask them to offer their feedback during the hiring process. This type of screening may help you weed out people who may be too authoritarian or patronizing to be appropriate for an SE program.

## Build support for your SE program

Developing successful SE services depends on the support and collaboration of a number of stakeholders. Internally, it is important that your director and staff across the agency understand and support the implementation of SE. Your SE program is more likely to achieve high fidelity if your agency director is informed and involved in the implementation process from the start.

It is important that your agency director take the lead in promoting the SE program and addressing any misconceptions that consumers cannot work. Your agency director should articulate internal and public support for your SE program by telling key stakeholders that people with mental illnesses can succeed in competitive employment and that SE services are linked to positive consumer outcomes. Emphasize the importance of your SE services by demonstrating how work helps consumers get on with life beyond illness to achieve their personal recovery goals.

Once your agency director has articulated a clear vision for implementing SE, bolster internal support for your SE program by providing basic information to all agency staff. For more information, see *Develop a Training Plan* later in this booklet.

## Form advisory committees

Forming an SE advisory committee is an effective way to gain the support of key stakeholders for your SE program. Identify community stakeholders with an interest in the success of your SE program to serve on your committee. Committees often include the following personnel:

- Representatives from your local consumer organizations;
- Members of your local family organizations;
- Designated vocational rehabilitation counselors;
- Representatives from your local mental health authority;
- Key agency staff; and
- SE staff.

Consider also establishing a Business Advisory Council to engage and elicit feedback from local employers. Use the forum to educate employers about the benefits of hiring people with disabilities. Inform them that SE services can provide the following:

- A pool of interested and qualified applicants;
- Prescreening of potential applicants to assess their skills and strengths for available positions;
- Short-term, onsite job coaching to help new employees become situated;
- Guidance about reasonable accommodations; and
- Information about the Work Opportunities Tax Credit that reduces their federal income tax liability.

To start, your mental health authority representative or agency director should voice support for the SE initiative. Next, basic training should be provided to help advisory group members understand the SE model. Once established, advisory groups may help implement SE in a variety of ways. For more information, see *Getting Started with Evidence-Based Practices* in this KIT.

## Sustain support for your SE program

Building support for your SE program should be an ongoing effort. Once your SE program is operational, find ways to recognize and reward the achievements of SE staff and consumers. For example, organize meetings with key stakeholders where consumers share employment success stories and administrators highlight staff achievements.

Another option is to sponsor an employment banquet to celebrate the program's accomplishments with consumers, family members, employers, and agency staff members. Banquets are particularly helpful if a wide array of stakeholders (such as physicians, administrators, and key public officials) attend.

Your agency director and SE leader should meet regularly to review program evaluation data, discuss roadblocks, and plan ways to improve your SE program.

## Develop a collaborative relationship with your local vocational rehabilitation agency

Many agencies collaborate with the rehabilitation services administration (also known as vocational rehabilitation) to provide SE services. Vocational rehabilitation and mental health agencies share the goal of helping people with disabilities return to work and increase their independence.

Historically, the two state systems have not always collaborated in a way that provides seamless and coordinated services for consumers. If this is the case in your state, your SE initiative presents a new opportunity to build an effective working relationship with your local vocational rehabilitation agency.

Collaborations may bring added resources and services. For example, vocational rehabilitation counselors may provide the following:

- Training;
- Additional job shadowing;
- Job-related equipment and supplies;
- School tuition;
- Planning assistance; or
- Assistance with placement and support.

Work with your agency director and mental health authority representative to engage local and state vocational rehabilitation representatives early in the implementation process. Share information about SE and invite them to participate in your SE advisory group.

Understanding the guidelines and practices of each other's systems will close the gaps that have formed barriers and create new ways of working together to provide more effective services for consumers.

Agencies with effective relationships with their local vocational rehabilitation agency communicate regularly with designated vocational rehabilitation counselors. Often counselors are included on consumers' treatment teams. Other SE programs also arrange for counselors to meet weekly or biweekly with consumers at the mental health agency.

In summary, building support from internal staff and key community stakeholders for your SE initiative is essential to implementing effective SE services.

### Agency directors can lead this effort

- Articulating clear support for the SE program to internal staff and key community stakeholders
- Attending some SE trainings, supervision, and advisory group meetings
- Meeting monthly with the SE leader to address roadblocks to providing SE
- Facilitating ongoing planning and program improvement efforts
- Engaging local and state vocational rehabilitation agency representatives

## Develop effective policies and procedures

Starting a new SE program means developing policies and procedures that support the activities of the SE model.

### What policies and procedures should cover

- Admission criteria
- Discharge criteria
- Staffing criteria
- Program organization and communication
- Assessment and treatment planning criteria
- Consumer records requirements
- Consumers' rights
- Program and team member performance evaluation

### Develop admission criteria

When you develop your SE admission criteria, integrate the principles of the SE model. The SE model includes specific criteria that you should integrate into your admissions and discharge criteria. The SE model indicates that services should be accessible to as many consumers as possible. Consumers should not be excluded from SE services because of substance abuse or cognitive impairments or because they are not "ready to work." According to SE principles, all consumers who want to work are eligible—no one is excluded.

Develop a simple referral process using minimal eligibility criteria. Typically, SE leaders receive all referrals, review them, and pair consumers with employment specialists. This process should occur rapidly. In the SE model, employment specialists and consumers meet within one week after the referral. Engaging consumers in SE services quickly has been found to be a key component in providing effective SE services.

Once you have developed your referral process, integrate it into your intake procedures so that consumers who are new to your agency know that SE services are available. SE staff and intake specialists should review how to explain the SE program to consumers in a way that helps them make informed decisions about accepting services.

Generating referrals takes some planning and effort at first. All of the activities designed to build support for your program (described in this booklet) can also help you generate referrals. Acquaint a variety of stakeholders with your referral process including these individuals:

- All staff in your agency;
- SE advisory committee members; and
- Consumers in your agency.

The key to generating referrals is to get the word out. Elicit ideas from your SE advisory group and staff for engaging consumers and increasing referrals. On the next page is an example of an SE referral form that you may use as a basis for creating your own.

## Sample Supported Employment Program Referral Form

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Consumer's name** | | Consumer's I.D. number | |
| **Telephone** | (_____) _____ --_____ | Date of referral | ____/___/_____ |
| **Referral source** | | Date referral was received | ____/___/_____ |
| **Assigned to** | | | |
| **Date of first meeting with employment specialist** | ___/___/_____ | Date Employment Plan was completed | ____/___/_____ |
| **Job suggestions and recommendations for work environments** | | | |
| **Medications and side effects, if any, that might interfere with work such as shaking, memory impairment, drowsiness, etc.** | | | |
| **Substance use** (substances, current use) | | | |
| **Criminal history** (if any) | | | |
| **Any information you feel would help this person reach his or her employment goals** | | | |

## Develop discharge criteria

When you develop your SE discharge criteria, integrate the principles from the SE model. Some consumers struggle with symptoms that persist over time, so their optimal treatment and rehabilitation require a long-term commitment. For this reason, despite their vocational success, consumers who receive SE services are never terminated unless they directly request it. In your SE discharge policies and procedures specify that follow-along supports should be provided to consumers on a time-unlimited basis.

## Establish staffing criteria

Your SE policies and procedures should also specify the staffing criteria for your program. Generally, SE teams should plan on having an employment specialist-to-consumer ratio of no more than 25 consumers per employment specialist.

**To figure your program capacity:**

Total number of employment specialists = 2 FTE

Maximum number of consumers per practitioner = 25:1

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | 2 | FTE |
| X | 25 | consumers per employment specialists |
| | 50 | maximum program capacity |

You may consider decreasing this ratio in the first year of implementation. Make sure your staff-to-consumer ratio is small enough to ensure that all employment specialists learn how to practice high-fidelity SE. No matter how well a team is organized or how competent employment specialists may be, the team will be unable to achieve high-fidelity practice if its caseload is too large during the first year.

Once your program is fully operational, continue to monitor the staff-to-consumer ratio. If you exceed the maximum number of consumers, work effectiveness will break down and employment specialists will react to crises (or the imminent threat of crises) rather than help consumers take proactive steps towards achieving their vocational goals.

## Create useful job descriptions

Include clear and useful job descriptions within the staffing criteria of your SE policies. For job applicants, a good position description clarifies whether a particular position matches their skills and expectations. Develop task-specific position descriptions, outline the main task categories, and detail specific duties.

Clear job descriptions allow SE leaders to effectively supervise new employees and also allow employees to focus on the basic elements of their jobs.

## Discuss program organization and communication

SE policies and procedures should include criteria for how the SE program is organized and how employment specialists relate to one another. To be effective, employment specialists must be able to work both independently and as team members. As members of the SE team, employment specialists should communicate regularly and provide cross-coverage for consumers.

Employment specialists should also attend weekly SE group supervisory meetings. These meetings give employment specialists the opportunity to discuss and problem-solve consumer cases.

In addition to group supervision, employment specialists should meet weekly to share job leads, which are often obtained through networking. Instruct employment specialists to keep an employer log to track the businesses they contact. In this meeting, SE staff can review the employer log and plan ways to build more employer relationships.

Your SE policies should also outline clear procedures for how SE staff will communicate with other treatment team members. SE services are most effective in an environment where employment specialists are part of a clinical treatment team that communicates frequently and meets weekly. Close coordination of SE services with other mental health rehabilitation and treatment ensures that everyone involved (not just employment specialists) provides services that support consumers' vocational goals.

Employment specialists can work on several multidisciplinary treatment teams. However, if they work on more than two teams, they generally have to spend too much time in meetings or don't have the chance to adequately communicate with other team members.

Treatment teams are organized differently from one agency to the next. Some teams quickly run through the list of consumers they serve, communicating with team members about employment and clinical issues. Other treatment teams just share information about crisis situations. In the latter kind of meeting, time must be set aside and guarded by the team leader for proactive communication about employment. Additionally, employment specialists must actively participate and speak during treatment team meetings.

Integrating SE services with mental health treatment may be more challenging if employment specialists and other team members work for different agencies. Seek creative solutions to ensure that employment specialists are able to meet weekly and communicate frequently with consumers' clinical treatment teams.

## Involve significant others

SE policies and procedures should encourage and facilitate involving family and other supporters to help consumers increase their natural supports. Instruct employment specialists to ask consumers to identify a family member or other supporter whom they would like to involve in SE services.

Involving family or other supporters helps employment specialists to do the following:

- Clarify consumer interests, strengths, skills, and abilities;
- Identify job leads;
- Determine whether a potential job is a good match;
- Identify challenges consumers are facing on the job; and
- Provide ongoing support to working consumers.

With consumers' permission, family or other supporters may join meetings with the consumer and employment specialist, meet or talk with the employment specialist alone, or attend treatment team meetings.

## Develop assessment and treatment planning criteria

Outline procedures for assessment and treatment planning in your SE policies and procedures. In general, SE staff use two tools to assess and track consumers' goals and progress:

- Vocational Profile; and
- Individual Employment Plan.

Employment specialists and consumers complete the Vocational Profile within a few weeks after consumers are referred to the SE program. Information collected on the Vocational Profile helps employment specialists begin the job search rapidly.

Starting the job search within one month has been found to be a key component of providing effective SE services. Procedures for completing the Vocational Profile should specify that the form does not need to be fully completed for the job search to begin. In others words, the job search should not be delayed in order to complete the form. Employment specialists should add information to the form as it becomes available.

Procedures should also instruct employment specialists to collect information from a variety of sources:

- The consumer;
- The treatment team;
- The consumer's record; and
- With permission, the consumer's family members and previous employers.

On the next several pages are examples of a Vocational Profile form and an Individual Employment Plan.

# Vocational Profile

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Consumer's name** | | **Consumer's I.D. number** | |
| **Completed by** | | **Date completed** | __/___/___ |

## Work goal

| | |
|---|---|
| **Consumer's work goal and life dream for work**<br>What would you say is your dream job? What kind of work have you always wanted to do? | Dream job: |
| **Consumer's short-term work goal**<br>What job would you like to have now? | Job you'd like to have now: |

## Background

| | |
|---|---|
| **Education**<br>What school did you attend last?<br>What was the highest grade you completed? | Last school attended:<br><br>Highest grade completed: |

## Work history

| | |
|---|---|
| **Most recent job**<br>What was your most recent job?<br>What were the job duties? | Most recent job: _____ Job title: _____<br>Job started: ____/___/_____ Job ended: ____/___/_____<br>Number of hours worked per week: _____<br>Job duties: |
| **Reason for leaving job**<br>Why did the job end? | |
| **Positive experiences**<br>What did you like best about the job? | |
| **Problems on job**<br>What did you not like about the job? | |

# Vocational Profile

| Work history continued | |
|---|---|
| **Next most recent job**<br>What did you like best about the job??<br>What were the job duties? | Previous job: _____ Job title: _____<br>Job started: ____/___/_____ Job ended: ____/___/_____<br>Number of hours worked per week: _____<br>Job duties: |
| **Reason for leaving the job**<br>Why did the job end?<br>*Note*: Attach resume to capture additional work history. | |

| Current adjustment | |
|---|---|
| **Diagnosis** | |
| **Prodromal symptoms**<br>What are the first signs that you may be experiencing a symptom flare-up?<br>How would I be able to tell if you are having a bad day or not feeling well? | First signs of a flare-up:<br><br>Signs of a bad day: |
| **Coping strategies**<br>What do you do to make yourself feel better? | |
| **Medication management**<br>What medication do you take and when do you take it? | Medication: _____ When you take it: _____<br>Medication: _____ When you take it: _____<br>Medication: _____ When you take it: _____ |
| **Physical health**<br>How would you rate your physical health?<br>Do you have any physical limitations that might influence your work? What are they? | ❑ Excellent<br>❑ Good<br>❑ Fair<br>❑ Poor<br>Physical limitations: |
| **Endurance**<br>How many days per week would you like to work? How many hours a day? | Most number of days per week: _____<br>Most number of hours per day: _____ |

# Vocational Profile

| Current adjustment continued | |
|---|---|
| **Grooming**<br>Do you have a place to bathe or shower? | ❑ Yes<br>❑ No |
| Do you have the clothes you will need for work? | ❑ Yes<br>❑ No |
| **Interpersonal skills**<br>How well do you get along with people? | ❑ Excellent<br>❑ Good<br>❑ Fair<br>❑ Poor |

| Work skills | |
|---|---|
| **Job-seeking skills**<br>How have you looked for work in the past? | |
| **Specific vocational skills**<br>What skills have you learned either on the job or in school? | |
| **Aptitude**<br>What kind of work are you particularly good at? | |
| **Interests and daily routine**<br>What kinds of things do you like to do?<br>What is a typical day like for you? | |
| **Motivation and expectations**<br>What appeals to you about work?<br>What do you not like about work?<br>Are there things that you worry about regarding going back to work?<br>What do you think work will do for you personally, financially, and socially? | |

# Vocational Profile

| **Work skills** continued | |
|---|---|
| **Work habits**<br>How was your attendance in previous jobs?<br>What kinds of situations and tasks cause you to feel stress? | |
| **Support network**<br>Whom do you spend time with? | Person you spend time with: _____ How often: _____<br>Person you spend time with: _____ How often: _____<br>Person you spend time with: _____ How often: _____ |
| How often do you see or talk to them?<br>What do they think about work?<br>How could they support your work goals? | |
| **Current living situation**<br>Where do you live and with whom do you live? | Where you live: _____<br>_____<br>With whom? _____<br>_____ |
| **Transportation**<br>How would you get to work? | |
| **Substance use**<br>Have you ever used street drugs or alcohol?<br>Have other people in your life been concerned about your substance use? | ❑ Yes<br>❑ No<br>❑ Yes<br>❑ No |
| **Criminal record**<br>Have you ever been arrested? | ❑ Yes<br>❑ No |
| **Disclosure of mental illness**<br>Will you be willing to tell possible employers about your illness? | ❑ Yes<br>❑ No |
| **Income and benefits**<br>Where does your money come from? | Where your money comes from: _____<br>_____ |

# Vocational Profile

| **Work skills** continued | | |
|---|---|---|
| What medical benefits do you get? | What medical benefits? | _____<br>_____<br>_____<br>_____ |
| Do you manage your own money? | ❑ Yes<br>❑ No | |
| Do you know how earnings from work will affect other sources of income and medical benefits? | ❑ Yes<br>❑ No | |
| Have you spoken with a benefits counselor? If not, would you like to? | ❑ Yes<br>❑ No Would you like to? | ❑ Yes<br>❑ No |

The second tool is the Individual Employment Plan; an example of it is on the next page. Similar to the Vocational Profile, this form should be completed in the first few weeks after consumers are referred to the SE program.

Completing the form should not slow down the job search. Instead, you may add information to the Individual Employment Plan as it becomes available.

| Individual Employment Plan | Consumer name _____ | I.D. number |
|---|---|---|
| | Completed by | Date: __/___/___ |

## Overall vocational goal:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Objective 1** | | |
| Intervention | | |
| People responsible | | |
| Target date | __/___/___ | |
| Date objective achieved | __/___/___ | |
| **Objective 2** | | |
| Intervention | | |
| People responsible | | |
| Target date | __/___/___ | |
| Date objective achieved | __/___/___ | |
| Date job search began | __/___/___ | |
| Employers contacted | Employer | Date contacted |
| | | __/___/___ |
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We strongly encourage you to adapt these forms and incorporate them into your routine paperwork. For printable copies, see the CD-ROM for this KIT. For a more detailed discussion of the assessment and treatment planning process, see *Training Frontline Staff* in this KIT.

## Describe how to maintain consumer records

In your SE policies and procedures, describe how you will maintain consumer records. You must maintain records for each consumer and safeguard them against loss, tampering, and unauthorized use. The records should be consistent with the Joint Commission (formerly known as the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations) and Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services requirements.

If you are creating a new recordkeeping system, you will need materials to create records (for example, binders and forms) and to store them appropriately. You also need written policies and procedures for documenting and maintaining records. Educate your SE team and supervise them in completing the required documentation.

## Discuss how to ensure consumers' rights

In your SE policies and procedures, discuss how you will ensure that consumers' rights are upheld. Employment specialists should be aware of the state and federal consumer rights requirements, especially the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). For more information, visit **DisabilityInfo.gov**.

Furthermore, your SE policies and procedures should reflect the model's recovery orientation. Traditional services were developed with a biomedical approach to mental health treatment; they focus on reducing symptoms and preventing relapse. In contrast, the SE model is based on the concept of recovery. In the recovery framework, the expectation is that consumers can live a life in which mental illness is not the driving factor for their lives. Recovery means more than "maintaining" people with mental illnesses in the community. Recovery-oriented services encourage consumers to define and fulfill their personal goals, such as a goal to work.

Employment specialists must believe in and be true to the recovery principles within the SE model. SE teams should be careful not to replicate those elements of traditional services that simply emphasize containing symptoms and complying with medication.

The value of consumer choice in service delivery and the importance of consumer perceptions must be infused in how you provide SE services. Most practitioners have never examined their own attitudes and behaviors about consumer recovery and, therefore, uncritically accept many clinical traditions without paying attention to how disempowering these practices are for consumers.

In recovery-based SE services, establishing a trusting relationship is critical. Interactions with consumers should be based on mutuality and respect.

- Employment specialists should be challenged to listen to, believe in, and understand consumers' perspectives and take into account consumers' reasons for "noncompliance."
- Employment specialists should also focus on consumer-defined needs and preferences and accept consumer choice in service delivery.

SE services provided with a recovery orientation mean that employment specialists put more effort into supporting and empowering consumers to achieve their individual goals.

### How administrators and SE leaders can help provide recovery-oriented SE services

- Clearly explain consumer rights in SE policies and procedures
- Offer training on recovery principles and consumer rights
- Hold community forums using the multimedia tools in this KIT
- Involve consumers in local advisory groups

## Develop procedures to evaluate program and team member performance

When properly implemented, SE services are associated with a variety of positive outcomes. For example, consumers in SE programs were more likely to achieve these goals:

- Obtain competitive work;
- Earn higher wages;
- Work more hours;
- Show improved symptoms;
- Show improved self-esteem; and
- Express satisfaction with their finances.

Evaluating the performance of your SE program will help you provide high-quality services to consumers and assure stakeholders of the effective performance of your SE program. We recommend that you develop procedures to evaluate your SE program early using the guidelines in *Evaluating Your Program* in this KIT.

Additionally, you should develop procedures for how you will supervise and evaluate the performance of your SE team. To a large extent, clinical supervision is the process that will determine whether your SE team will simply be a group of mental health professionals doing what they've always done or whether they will truly change and provide services in an evidence-based way.

We recommend that SE leaders supervise the SE staff weekly. Group supervision should review all consumers involved in the SE program and problem-solve ways to help them better meet their individual goals.

Because SE leaders dedicate some time to direct services, they will be familiar with all of the parts of providing SE services. SE leaders will not just review "cases" that employment specialists present, but will also be able to actively problem-solve using SE principles and techniques. SE leaders also provide individual, side-by-side supervision, as follows:

- To assess performance;
- To give feedback; and
- To model interventions.

SE leaders may schedule regular meetings with employment specialists to review specific cases. They should be regularly available to consult with employment specialists, as needed.

Some aspects of the employment specialist's job are hard to understand without seeing them done by an experienced practitioner. Once SE leaders thoroughly understand the SE model, they should take employment specialists out into the field to model aspects of the job—such as job development—and directly coach them in their work. For training tools and recommendations, see *Training Frontline Staff* in this KIT.

If the SE team is working with a consultant, the SE leader should involve the consultant in group supervision, treatment team meetings, and job development meetings. In many new SE programs, it has been found that feedback from an external consultant is a crucial component for improving staff performance and the quality of the program as a whole.

## Develop a training plan

Developing an SE team is a complex undertaking. Recruiting and retaining employment specialists who know the SE model or who know how to treat consumers can be difficult. Agencies that have successfully implemented an SE program indicate that offering one-time training for employment specialists is not enough. Instead, you should assess the knowledge level of key stakeholders (See *Evaluating Your Program*) and develop a training plan.

### What should your training plan include?

- Basic training for key stakeholders, including consumers, families, mental health authorities, and members of key community organizations
- Basic training for staff at all levels across the agency
- Intensive training for employment specialists
- Basic training on benefits and work incentives

Practitioners who implement evidence-based practices (EBPs) are often stymied in their efforts because people misunderstand the model or lack information. It is important that key stakeholders (consumers, families, and other essential community members) and agency-wide staff develop a basic understanding of SE.

This training will build support for your SE program. Your SE staff will find that they are better able to generate referrals for their SE program, develop job leads, and provide job supports. Since effective SE services depend on integrating SE and clinical services, it is important for all members of the treatment team to have a basic understanding of the SE model.

Additionally, consumers, families, and other key stakeholders may hold misconceptions about consumers' ability and desire to work or how work may affect their benefits. It is important to correct false beliefs before they impede implementing your SE program. Consider organizing routine educational meetings for consumers, families, or other key stakeholders in which consumers who have received SE services or employers who have hired consumers through an SE program share their experiences. For materials to support this basic training, see *Using Multimedia to Introduce Your EBP*. You will find these resources:

- An introductory PowerPoint presentation;
- A sample brochure in both English and Spanish; and
- The introductory video.

Once trained, SE leaders and employment specialists will be able to use these materials to conduct routine community workshops and in-service seminars. Furthermore, the SE KIT includes *Training Frontline Staff*, which gives employment specialists in-depth information about the SE model and skills for providing SE services. SE leaders may facilitate a structured group training using these materials.

Once employment specialists have a basic understanding of the model, we recommend that they visit an existing, well-functioning, high-fidelity SE team to observe how employment specialists work with consumers and how they interact with one another.

In addition to in-depth training on the SE model, we also suggest that you offer basic training on benefits and work incentives to employment specialists and other practitioners. Employment specialists should be able to define the following terms:

- Medicaid and 1619B Medicaid;
- Medicaid for the Working Disabled;
- Medicare;

- Supplemental Security Income (SSI);
- Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI);
- Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS);
- Impairment-Related Work Expense;
- Substantial Gainful Employment (SGA);
- Ticket to Work;
- Expedited reinstatement for benefits; and
- The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) mandatory earned income inclusion.

Rules about benefits are complicated and are periodically adjusted, which makes it hard to stay up to date. Resources are available to help you develop and maintain your staff's knowledge about benefits.

Consider regularly offering training on benefits to help SE staff stay as current as possible. Contact the Social Security Administration to find training resources. The Social Security Administration has Area Work Incentive Coordinators (AWICS) in every state, and many local Social Security Administration offices also have Work Incentive Liaisons who can provide training and consultation to agencies and staff. Visit **DisabilityInfo.gov** for more information.

Another resource is the Social Security Administration's *Redbook*. Use it as a reference guide for SSDI and SSI. To see the *Redbook* online, go to **www.ssa.gov/work**.

### Hire an external consultant and trainer

Establishing the initial processes that must be in place to provide quality services requires great attention to detail. Consequently, during the first 1 to 2 years after forming a new SE team, many agencies have found it helpful to work with an experienced external consultant and trainer. Consultants and SE leaders often work together over the 2 years to ensure that the SE program is structured appropriately. They integrate SE principles into the agency's policies and tailor SE program procedures to meet local needs.

Once the program has been launched, it is important that you do not allow employment specialists to revert to older and more familiar ways of doing things. External consultants and trainers who are experienced in running SE programs can provide ongoing technical assistance, side-by-side supervision, and periodic booster training sessions. This type of assistance, along with ongoing evaluation of fidelity and outcomes, has been found to be critical in maintaining adherence to SE practices.

## Select a location for your SE program

Although employment specialists will spend 60 percent or more time in the community, sometimes they will meet with consumers in your agency. For this reason, it is important for employment specialists to have a place to meet with consumers and to have access to a desk, a phone, voice mail, and a computer that includes Internet capabilities.

Office space should not be separate from the rest of the clinical treatment team. Ideally, the offices are intermingled and the space is consistent with how space is allotted for other team members. Touching base in the hall and lunchroom with other treatment team members providing SE services facilitates ongoing communication that supports the goals of SE.

Additionally, access to a cell phone for outreach work can increase safety and improve communication. Marketing materials such as business cards and a SE brochure also facilitate job development activities. See *Using Multimedia to Introduce Your EBP* in this KIT for a sample SE brochure.

## Review your SE program budget and revenue sources

It is important for you to understand your SE program budget and revenue sources so that you can actively participate in the budgeting process, make informed management decisions, and understand where collateral revenue sources are most needed.

In some mental health systems, SE programs receive a fixed rate for each consumer who receives services. In other systems, SE programs are only reimbursed based on the specific services provided. In that case, you should be familiar with how services must be tracked to capture billing from various funding streams. You will also need to know the billing process and billing codes.

Financing mechanisms for SE vary from agency to agency. The leaders of numerous agencies and systems have successfully established ways to fund SE services using Medicaid, vocational rehabilitation funding, and other sources.

In some states, mental health authorities have worked out a mechanism to pool funds that can be used to reimburse the services of SE programs. Also, state Medicaid rules may allow reimbursement for selected SE activities.

Financial barriers can slow implementation. Consulting with agencies and system administrators who have been successful in this area can give you useful ideas and strategies.

Consider how implementing SE will affect the agency.

- Will some types of services be reduced or eliminated in order to pay for your SE program?
- What will the impact of decreased group attendance be when consumers go to work?
- Will evening hours be needed?

Be aware that over time the mission and activities of programs can become defined by the funding that supports them. Know the principles of SE and be vigilant that funding opportunities support the model rather than shape and corrode it.

In summary, building an effective, well-functioning SE team is a developmental process. We encourage you to periodically revisit the information in this KIT throughout the first year after starting your new program. We believe that these materials will take on a new meaning as the process of implementing an SE program evolves.

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A Life in the Community for Everyone

SAMHSA

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

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