ROLE OF THE IPS SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT TRAINER

The implementation of evidence-based IPS Supported Employment services is a complex process that involves philosophical, systematic, organizational and programmatic changes. These changes typically involve mental health agencies and VR offices, but may also affect peer or consumer-run organizations and other stakeholder groups.

Assess current practices, organizational structure and philosophies

The trainer should spend time at the mental health agency and local VR office to learn how services are currently provided. Trainers and state implementers can use any or all of the activities outlined below to gain an understanding of current practices.

1. **Assess readiness for implementation.** Typically, before selecting a site for implementation, a trainer should spend a day at a site to meet with agency administrators, observe a employment unit meeting, spend time speaking with the employment team, talk to clients who have received employment services, meet with the local VR counselor and VR supervisor, and talk to at least a few of the mental health practitioners. At the end of the day, or within a couple of weeks, the trainer should provide feedback to the agency about practices and organizational structures that are consistent with IPS supported employment, as well as changes that the agency and system would need to make in order to implement IPS supported employment. Some agencies may be surprised at the degree of change needed. An example of a site readiness checklist may be found at [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~ips/](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~ips/).

2. **Spend time at the site.** Sit in on employment team meetings and mental health team meetings. Meet with the IPS supervisor to ask about his or her challenges, as well as things that she believes are going well.

3. **Meet with VR counselors and/or the local VR supervisor.** Discuss IPS supported employment principles and ask what the counselors think about those principles. How will implementation affect the way that counselors do their work?

4. **Conduct a fidelity visit and provide feedback through a written report.** Information about IPS Supported Employment fidelity visits may be found at [http://www.dartmouth.edu/~ips/](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~ips/). After providing the agency with a written report, meet with agency administrators and the IPS team to discuss the report and help the agency develop a written plan for IPS implementation. Continue with fidelity visits twice a year until the program reaches good fidelity. If possible, conduct fidelity visits at least annually thereafter.
Provide training and consultation

Remember, the IPS supported employment team is not the only group of practitioners that will benefit from training. Mental health practitioners need to understand basic information about the IPS supported employment approach, as well as strategies to help people consider employment. Peer, or consumer-lead groups, should receive information about new services and may have helpful feedback to the organization about implementation. Further, VR counselors should be invited to most, if not all, training since IPS supported employment includes a strong partnership with VR. Finally, families are an important stakeholder group for IPS supported employment. Trainers should reach out to local family groups and organizations. A sample training plan may be found at http://www.dartmouth.edu/~ips/.

Trainers should also remember that classroom style training alone does not lead to change. Traditional training is helpful in that it can help people adopt new philosophies and also help practitioners develop a vision about how services will develop over time. However, most people have difficulty changing the way that they provide services without side-by-side assistance. We strongly recommend that trainers work in the field with practitioners to help them solve unanticipated problems. For example, an employment specialist may feel confident about job development during training, but become unsettled when an employer asks her a difficult question. In order for programs to make significant changes, trainers should visit programs at least monthly, though more frequent visits are preferable. Between visits, some consultation may be provided by phone. Some recommended activities include the following:

- **Provide mentoring for job development.** Go out with employment specialists to meet with employers. First model an employer contact and then ask the specialist to take the lead with the next employer. Process the experience with the specialist, being sure to point out some positive things that the person did, as well as some strategies that he might try the next time.

  Ask supervisors to go out with you and an employment specialist at least quarterly. Let the supervisor make some employer contacts. Ask the supervisor to go out with her staff on a regular basis to help them learn how to develop relationships with employers. Check back with supervisors by phone, or in person, to talk about her efforts to field mentor this difficult skill.

- **Attend IPS supported employment team meetings** in person, or by phone. Participate as a team member, making occasional suggestions and asking questions. Demonstrate to the team how to use IPS supported employment principles when brainstorming solutions to help clients with their employment goals. Talk to the IPS supervisor after the meeting to share observations or suggestions.
• **Meet with the IPS supervisor** by phone, or in person, on a quarterly basis to review program outcomes. Discuss outcomes that are going well, and ask about outcomes that are a concern. Help the supervisor think of plans to mentor employment specialists who are having difficulties. For example, if a particular specialist has trouble engaging newly referred clients, the supervisor could make plans to ask the specialist where he meets with new people, she could also make plans to sit in on a few appointments with new clients and demonstrate how to engage in conversation in a positive way.

• **Attend mental health treatment team meetings.** Try to assess how well IPS supported employment is integrated into the mental health teams. For example, does the employment specialist participate in the entire meeting? Do mental health practitioners help generate ideas for jobs or job supports? If not, help by asking questions about individual clients as they are discussed. “Does anyone have ideas about ways to help John manage his work income?” “What type of job supports does anyone think would be best to help Ivy with her new job?”

• **Ask employment specialists to talk to you about someone on their caseload who is having difficulty meeting his or her goals.** Ask the employment specialist if you can go with them the next time he or she is meeting with that person. Share observations or suggestions after the meeting.

• **Attend an occasional meeting between the VR program and IPS team** in which caseloads are discussed. Participate in the meeting by helping to celebrate successes and generate solutions for difficult situations.

• **Organize statewide IPS supervisor meetings.** It is critical that IPS supervisors develop a rich understanding of IPS supported employment, as well as good supervision skills. Learning from the training can be augmented by opportunities to learn from other supervisors. Many states organize statewide (or regional) supervisor meetings to provide additional training to supervisors, as well as opportunities for supervisors to connect with each other.

**Help with organizational changes**

In addition to working with supervisors and practitioners, trainers must also ask agency administrators for help with IPS implementation. Often, the executive director, chief operating officer or clinical director are the positions that have the authority to make necessary changes. For instance, some agencies do not have mental health team meetings that provide clinical supervision in a group format. If this is the case, trainers and state implementers must talk to the agency about the benefits of using this approach and help the agency make plans to implement mental health teams with weekly meetings. Trainers will find it helpful to identify an agency champion for IPS supported employment who can help navigate the organizational culture for making changes.
Trainers should also remember that some agencies will be ready to make large changes quickly, while others will be more likely to change if incremental goals can be identified. In the example above, agency administrators who balk at weekly meetings, might be willing to begin with monthly mental health practitioner meetings. After a few months, the trainer could ask administrators to talk to supervisors in order to find out if the meetings were helpful, and to evaluate the prospect of more frequent meetings.

IPS steering committees or leadership committees are another approach to help agencies with organizational change. Quarterly meetings could include agency administrators, VR liaisons, family members, clients, the IPS supervisor, employers and others. The purpose of the group is to keep everyone focused on implementation and sustainability of IPS. Initially, trainers and state implementers should attend every meeting to help set the course for IPS. Over time, the steering committee may only need help from the trainer on occasion. More information about steering committees can be found at: http://dms.dartmouth.edu/dsec/resources/tools/implementing/

Finally, talk to agency administrators about agency goals for employment. Do they know how many people with serious mental illness at the agency have competitive employment? What would be the benefits of increasing that number? How does employment fit into the mission of the agency? How will the agency monitor progress in this area? Does the agency differentiate between competitive jobs and other types of employment?

**Provide statewide leadership for IPS supported employment**

Trainers should be aware of, and ask about, financial barriers to IPS implementation. State leadership from both VR and mental health may be necessary to help agencies understand available resources for IPS supported employment. If funding is not available for some part of the vocational process, such as long-term job supports, it is up to the state departments to try to find revenue for these services.

Trainers may also help identify systems barriers to IPS supported employment. For example, if VR has traditionally used vocational evaluation prior to helping people find employment, state VR leaders may be needed to help change this practice. Or, good work incentives planning is a scarce resource, state leaders must develop a plan to increase this service in the state.

States should also make plans to expand IPS supported employment throughout the state. The purpose of implementation is not to have a few boutique programs in select areas of the state, but to make the evidence-based approach widely available. State leaders should plan to gradually increase the number of programs that offer this practice, while ensuring that enough technical assistance will be available to programs as they try to implement and sustain ISP supported employment. Typically, a full-time trainer will work with 3-4 programs for the first year and slowly add additional sites. It’s important to have high quality programs that produce good outcomes.
State leadership committees operate much in the same way that local steering committees work to develop goals and action steps for better implementation. The difference is that the state committees think about statewide barriers and facilitators for IPS supported employment. For example, a state leadership committee might hear from the trainer that few sites are using Medicaid for services that are billable. In response, the committee could decide to host trainings to explain which services are billable and how to document services. Or, the trainer might share information about the way that a particular VR office collaborates with the local IPS supported employment program. In response the state committee might decide to share those strategies with VR offices across the state. Membership for state committees could include state-level VR administrators, VR supervisors from local offices, state trainers, liaisons from the state department of mental health, NAMI representatives, consumer advocate organizations, leaders from a few provider agencies, employers, and so on.