Practice Principles of IPS Supported Employment

**Competitive employment is the goal**
Employment specialists help clients obtain competitive jobs. Competitive employment is defined: paying at least minimum wage and the wage that others receive performing the same work, based in community settings alongside others without disabilities, and not reserved for people with disabilities. Clients prefer competitive jobs over sheltered work. Working alongside others without psychiatric disabilities helps to reduce stigma and discrimination.

**IPS supported employment is integrated with treatment**
IPS supported employment services are closely integrated with mental health treatment. Employment specialists are members of multidisciplinary teams that meet regularly to review client progress. Discussions include clinical and rehabilitation information that is relevant to work, such as medication side effects, persistent symptoms, cognitive difficulties, or other rehabilitation needs. They share information and develop ideas to help clients improve their functional recovery.

**Zero Exclusion: Eligibility is based on client choice**
Every person with severe mental illness who wants to work is eligible for IPS supported employment, regardless of psychiatric diagnosis, symptoms, work history, or other problems, including substance abuse and cognitive impairment. The core philosophy of IPS supported employment is that all persons with a disability can work at competitive jobs in the community without prior training, and that no one should be excluded from this opportunity. Agencies develop a culture of work so all practitioners encourage clients to consider working.

**Attention to client preferences**
Services are based on clients’ preferences and choices, rather than providers’ judgments. Client preferences help determine the type of job that is sought, the nature of support provided by the employment specialist and team, and whether to disclose the aspects of a person’s psychiatric disability to the employer.

**Benefits counseling is important**
Employment specialists help clients to access ongoing guidance regarding Social Security, Medicaid, and other government entitlements. Fear of losing benefits is a major reason that clients may not want to seek employment. It is vital that clients obtain accurate information to inform and guide the plan for starting work and over time for making decisions about changes in wages and work hours.

**Rapid job search**
Employment specialists help clients seek jobs directly, rather than providing extensive pre-employment assessment and training, or intermediate work experiences. Beginning the job search process early (i.e., within 30 days) demonstrates to clients that their desire to work is taken seriously, and conveys optimism that there are multiple opportunities available in the community for clients to achieve their vocational goals.

**Systematic job development**
Employment specialists develop relationships with employers, based upon their clients’ work preferences, by meeting face-to-face over multiple visits. Employment specialists learn about the work environment and the employers’ work needs. They find out about jobs that they may not be aware of at employment sites. They gather information about the nature of job opportunities and assess whether they may be a good job fit. Employment specialists continue to make periodic visits because networking is how people find jobs.

**Time-unlimited support**
Follow-along supports are individualized and continued for as long as the client wants and needs the support. IPS specialists and other members of the treatment team provide work support. In addition they look for natural supports (e.g., family member, co-worker) that would be available over time. The goal is to help the client become as independent as possible in his or her vocational role, while providing support and assistance as needed. Once a person has worked steadily (e.g., one year), they discuss transitioning from IPS.

IPS stands for Individual Placement and Support, which is the evidence-based practice of supported employment for people with severe mental illnesses.

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