

## WORKING TO RECOVER

For most of us, work is part of who we are. When we are able to feel good about what we do, we are able to see ourselves in a more positive light. Work helps to provide structure and routine to our lives and contributes to overall health. Income earned on the job gives us choices about what we will buy, where we will live, and allows us to make our own choices across the board. For those with severe mental illness or suffering from an addiction, working provides the same benefits, and can be an essential piece of the recovery puzzle. Often support is needed to make employment a reality for these individuals.

Individuals in recovery who work are more likely to achieve the recovery goals they have set for themselves, thus achieving a higher quality of life. Employment helps individuals gain economic independence, allowing spending power, giving them the ability to get the things they need and focus on their recovery. Many have found the process of identifying, acquiring, and maintaining employment to be therapeutic and see employment as a way to stay active and continue learning throughout life.

Advocates of mental health and recovery services across the country believe in the value of work, as an aid to the recovery process and recognize that jobs can help people develop the motivation to change, increase dignity and self respect, and hope for the future. But those engaging the recovery process from alcohol and drug use or severe mental illness face several challenges. First, there is recovery itself, the recovery of the skills and aptitudes needed to acquire or re-acquire a valued role in the community, the stigma presented by potential employers, and the challenges for those who are receiving public benefits on what impact employment might have on these benefits.

### The Facts

- The unemployment rate among people with serious and persistent mental illnesses is 90% -- Research shows that 60-70% of people with mental illnesses want to find work.
- Employment contributes to drug abuse treatment success and is an important treatment outcome, increasing earned income 49% for individuals who do complete treatment.
- Competitive jobs reduce stigma by enabling people in recovery to work side-by-side with people in their communities.

### Why it is important for people in recovery to work...

Supported Employment Decreases
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• unemployment</li><li>• dependence on public systems of care</li><li>• symptoms of mental illness</li><li>• hospitalizations</li><li>• stigma in the community about mental illness</li></ul>

Supported Employment Increases
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• employment in competitive jobs</li><li>• number of hours worked</li><li>• amount of income earned in competitive jobs</li></ul>

Competitive Employment Improves:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• self-esteem</li><li>• self-management of mental health symptoms</li><li>• independent living</li><li>• autonomy</li></ul>

# Bridging the Employment Gap

## Employment Strategies for Individuals in Recovery

The following list contains a number of strategies that can be utilized to support individuals in recovery as they attain and sustain employment:

**Transitional Employment** - treatment based approach utilizing peer support and gaining work experience.

**Supported Employment** - helps individuals engaging the recovery process to identify, acquire, and maintain competitive employment by providing any supports necessary for success.

**The PACT Vocational Model** - The Program of Assertive Community Treatment is based on trial and error and typically serves consumers coming out of state hospitals.

**Individual Placement and Support** - IPS makes employment a high priority in the consumer treatment and rehabilitation plan, and elevates work to the same priority as mental health services.

**Social Enterprises and Affirmative Businesses** - a business venture created specifically to provide employment and career opportunities to a variety of disenfranchised groups.

**Self Employment** - provides an opportunity for individuals engaging in the recovery process to control their own vocational future.

## Myths Surrounding Recovery and Work

Myth: People with mental illness are unreliable employees.

Fact: Employers report the exact opposite, with higher than average attendance and punctuality.

Myth: Individuals in recovery from addiction are unreliable workers.

Fact: Recovering people are a good source of long-term employees. Once given a chance, employee loyalty is very high, as stigma has often taught them that being given a chance is the hardest part of successful employment.

Myth: Employees with a mental illness tend to only work in entry level positions.

Fact: National studies report that motivation, quality of work, and job tenure are as good as or better than other employees. In fact, some of the greatest contributions in politics, science and the arts are attributable to people with documented histories of mental illness, such as: Abraham Lincoln, Isaac Newton, Leo Tolstoy, Winston Churchill, and Ernest Hemingway.

## Benefits Planning - An Important Piece

Individuals in recovery may choose unemployment over employment out of fear of the possible negative impact of earned income upon cash benefits and/or medical benefits. To help make informed choices about employment, benefits specialists provide a benefits analysis, which include information about the following benefits: social security, disability benefits, income ceilings, housing subsidies, medication, scholarships, food stamps, and other benefit issues. To address the potential loss of medical benefits, the Medicaid Buy In for Workers with Disabilities (MBIWD) was designed to encourage Ohioans with disabilities or mental illness to go to work without risking the loss of Medicaid health care coverage. For more information, call 1-800-324-8680, or visit [www.jfs.ohio.gov/ohp/consumers](http://www.jfs.ohio.gov/ohp/consumers).

### Sources:

Ohio Department of Mental Health  
Vermont Department of Mental Health  
SAMHSA  
Canadian Mental Health Association  
[www.niatx.net](http://www.niatx.net)

National Alliance on Mental Illness  
Ohio Supported Employment CCOE  
US Department of Health and Human Services  
[www.recoveryatwork.org](http://www.recoveryatwork.org)