

Successful Vocational
Approaches to Working with
Individuals with Mental Illness

A Presentation

by

Vocational Services of NCHC

Agency and Program History

- North Central Health Care is a tri-county system of comprehensive mental health, developmental disability, early childhood, geriatric, AODA and vocational programs provided to the residents of three North Central Wisconsin counties ~ Marathon, Lincoln and Langlade.

- Our main campus is located in the city of Wausau (pop. 35,000) in Marathon County with two satellite offices located in the city of Merrill (pop. 10,000) in Lincoln County, and the city of Antigo (pop. 8,000) which is located in Langlade County.

- Marathon County is the largest county in the state of Wisconsin and all three counties we serve are very rural with most employment opportunities related to manufacturing and agriculture.

- Our Vocational Services Program was founded in 1975 as part of a growing interest and trend in community based employment for persons with disabilities, establishing one of the first Supported Employment programs in the state of Wisconsin and also one of the first programs to serve individuals with chronic and persistent mental illness.

- We have been in the business of securing employment for our consumers for 30 years.
- From the beginning we have served a higher percentage of individuals with chronic and persistent mental illness vs. Developmental Disabilities.
- We currently work with over 100 employers, serve 50 new DVR referrals per year and serve a long term population of 90 individuals with a variety of disability issues.

- We are also part of a broader more comprehensive inter-agency approach to supporting individuals with mental illness.
- By following the *Recovery Model* we find ourselves working in tandem with CSP (Community Support) and MHO (Mental Health Outreach) and CCS (Comprehensive Community Service) programs to insure that anyone interested in pursuing community work has the opportunity to participate.

The Recovery Model

- Encourages Self Determination and Self Sufficiency by promoting health and wellness, hope and optimism, improving the dignity and the quality of life of the individual.
- The Recovery Model fosters a greater potential to develop motivation to change, a sense of dignity and self respect as well hope for the future.
- Recovery = Helping People make good choices

Specifics to Consider

- History of the individuals illness
- Stigma Issues – perception of self and community perceptions
- Dual diagnosis issues
- The changing nature of work
- Value of the bounty of information in the Functional Assessment

History of the individuals illness

- Date or Time of onset
- Was there employment or work experience prior to onset of illness
- Has there been a large gap in the work history between the time of onset and the present
- Have there been hospitalizations or admissions that have disrupted employment opportunities

Issues related to Stigma

- What is the consumers perception of themselves
- Do they display any sense of self-awareness
- Do they present behaviors that stigmatize them in the community
- Does the community demonstrate a tolerance for or recognize that persons with mental illness can be rehabilitated, integrated and are employable
- And that with some reasonable accommodations these individuals are employable and can become valued employees

Issues related to a duel diagnosis

- Is the consumer aware that they may have a duel diagnosis
- If it involves alcohol or drugs are they or have they been sober and clean for a period of time
- If it involves a cognitive or learning disability have avenues been explored that provide all parties with a better understanding of the consumers potential limitations

An awareness of the changing nature of work

- We are moving towards a *Knowledge Based* economy
- We continue to experience a loss of manufacturing and production type jobs
- We will continue to see an increase of service based jobs
- 90 – 95% of jobs in the new economy require advanced cognitive or interpersonal skills

Psychiatric Disabilities in the Workplace

Presented by Dr. David Strauser and Deirdre O'Sullivan

Qualifying factors to consider

- Cognition – refers to intelligence, memory, academics and the ability to use these skills
- Pace – the ability to perform on a competitive level and at a steady and predictable rate
- Persistence – staying with the task until it is complete, even if one is distracted, frustrated or bored
- Reliability – coming to work every day and staying for the scheduled time, in spite of personal or emotional problems, stress, psychological or physical symptoms.

Strauser and O'Sullivan

Additional factors to consider

- Conscientiousness – both wanting and trying to do a good job and persisting until the desired result is accomplished
- Motivation – the will to succeed, the belief that one can succeed despite difficulties and the belief that doing ones best is important
- Interpersonal functioning – the ability to accept supervision, criticism, directives and an ability to get along with others

Strauser and O'Sullivan

Additional factors to consider

- Stress tolerance – the ability to withstand the everyday pressures of job demands without significant decline in job performance or an exacerbation of psychological or physical symptoms
- Job specific requirements – are there specific skills needed to successfully perform the required tasks of the job
- Work readiness – is the consumer ready to work and invested in the process of finding that job and going to work once the job has been secured

The Value and Importance of the Functional Assessment

- Structured Format with potential for individualized approaches
- Includes opportunities for work experience to test investment, cooperation, endurance, tolerance and real interest in potential employment settings
- Utilizes community and program resources
- Provides a baseline and blueprint from which to work and support the individual as they progress along the road to work

Assessment Format

- Identifying Information
- Clear understanding of the Diagnostic Impression
- Personal, Social, Psychiatric and medical history
- Job Interest and Development Information
- Job Related Barriers and Factors
- Comprehensive Review

Important factors

- Work history
- Medication regimen and any side effects
- Most functional time of the day
- Legal issues
- Substance abuse issues
- Sense of ownership and investment in the process

Important factors for Support

- Supports are based on the person centered planning model
- Working as a team is key when serving individuals with mental illness
- Effective relationships with mutual respect
- Effective communication between all involved parties including the consumer

Other factors for success

- Establishing concrete, obtainable goals
- Shared expectations
- clarity and understanding of the tasks involved to reach the consumers end goal, i.e. employment

Importance of working as a team

- Working as a team is key when serving those with Mental Illness
- Supports are based on the Person Centered Planning model
- This would include the identified individual, Case management, social workers, family members and others involved in the treatment and recovery of the individual.