

TRANSITIONS RTC

THE LEARNING & WORKING
DURING THE TRANSITION TO ADULTHOOD
REHABILITATION RESEARCH & TRAINING CENTER

Employment for Youth and Young Adults with
Serious Mental Health Conditions: The Employer Perspective

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Acknowledgements

The Transitions RTC aims to improve the supports for youth and young adults, ages 14-30, with serious mental health conditions who are trying to successfully complete their schooling and training and move into rewarding work lives. We are located at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, Worcester, MA, Department of Psychiatry, Systems & Psychosocial Advances Research Center. Visit us at:

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Presentation Objectives

1. Present employer perspectives' of hiring youth and young adults with serious mental health conditions
2. Describe the relationship between employer and mental health employment services
3. Discuss some ideas for reorientation of employment services that could help achieve better outcomes



Why Employment?

1. It is estimated that 6-12% of young adults struggle with a serious mental health condition¹
2. The unemployment rate for people with a serious mental health condition (SMHC) has been estimated at 85-92%² and maybe higher for young adults³
3. High school drop out rate for Special Education students with serious emotional disturbance is 45%⁴
4. A third of individuals receiving Social Security Income (SSI) under age 65 are young adults, and almost a quarter (24.0%) of those young adults have psychiatric disabilities. Receiving Social Security benefits is a strong disincentive to work⁵
5. Young adults diagnosed with a SMHC face several challenges finding and keeping a job e.g., lack of education, work experience, and readily available workplace supports in relation to managing symptoms, perceived discrimination and disclosure of having a mental health condition⁶



IPS and Young Adult Careers

The evidence-based practice in supported employment for people with mental health conditions is Individual Placement and Support (IPS). Key Features are:

1. Open to anyone who wants to work
2. Focus on competitive employment
3. Rapid job search
4. Systematic job development
5. Client preferences guide decisions
6. Individualized long-term supports
7. Integrated with treatment
8. Benefits counseling included



<http://www.dartmouthips.org/about-ips/>

Research Methods

Intensive semi-structured interviews with

- 9 Employers who have employed people with a mental health condition
- 12 Employment Specialist
- 10 Recovered Employees
 - up to one hour long
 - In-person/telephone



Employers

Most employers we interviewed were referred by Employment Specialist who work for various employment programs designed to help individuals of all ages with a SMHC:

- 5 direct supervisors
- 2 human resource personnel at large companies
- 2 senior personnel at small companies who did both hiring and supervision



EMPLOYER FINDINGS



Barriers to Employment

Personal skills:

*“Dependability usually with young people is an issue.”
Employer (E) 8*

“I’d like somebody who is properly dressed, articulate enough to communicate with the public, and is dependable.” E 9

“Probably the biggest reason we let people go is attendance.” E 2



Barriers to Employment

Soft skills:

“Attitude, 90% of the job is just showing up, the other 10% we can teach you but if you show up and you love your job and you like helping customers... a positive attitude.” E 4

“I’m looking for motivation, someone that is a hard worker.” E 5

“We look at the sincerity, the motivation...And if those people (company interviewers) don’t get the feeling that this person sincerely wants to work, wants to be here, needs to be here, then we’re probably not going to hire them.” E 6



Positives to Hiring Young Adults

“The younger ones are just so excited for work because they’ve got their own (station) and they’ve got their own check-out counter.” E 4

“When a young adult comes in for the first time, you have an opportunity. At least in the beginning they’re eager. At least in the beginning they listen.” E 6

“Young Adults they have this sense that they can do anything, which is such a wonderful thing, because the other folks we work with don’t have that. It’s like ‘I can’t, I can’t, I can’t.’ Instead of young adults where it’s like ‘I can. Damn, I can.’” E 7



Stigma

“Stigma always comes up as one of the barriers we face (in our workplace).” E 7

“Sometimes people say, ‘You know, we’re not ready to hire people with disabilities. We don’t have the infrastructure....and often times in the human resources department, staff get it. But then you have to go to the line managers and you have to go deep inside of organizations. And some people don’t get it.” E 5

“I looked at it two ways. I looked at-how can the (employees with a mental illness) benefit from it? But the other way I look at it, is how can my staff benefit from it? How can we break those barriers down?” E 6



Job Accommodations

“If you’re talking about someone with a mood disorder they might need certain times for their medication.” E 5

“People are maybe a little more...shy about disclosing for whatever reason, maybe a stigma, maybe they feel that’s gonna hurt them.” E 2

Interviewer: *“Are they asking for accommodations too, like right up front-they’ll say ‘Oh I have a mental illness, I need these types of accommodations’. Do they know what they need?”*

Employer: *“No and that’s the tough part. So it’s folks like myself that are doing the work...you have to figure out what they need. But if they’re not telling you exactly what they have and they don’t want to disclose that information, you’re trying to figure that out.” E 5*



Benefits: SSI/SSDI

“It means a lot to them to stay in the little niche that they have.” E7

Interviewer: *“Have you had people...that have been able to move into full time work with benefits (i.e. company benefits)...?”*

Employer: *“No, no, not here, no.” E3*

“We’ve offered employees if they wanted to stay or be hired by (organization) but none of them have really showed interest in that.” E 1

“I don’t really know that they would be able to make enough money in the positions that they’re capable of handling even if it was full time to be able to cover what their services cover...And actually, you know, if he could work full time, we would probably make him full time...due to his restrictions with social security and other things like that, other benefits, he need(s) to work under a certain number of hours a week....”

E 8



Education

“Education, I don’t know if that’s a factor as much. We don’t have a lot of positions that require a degree. We don’t even have a lot of positions that require you have a high school diploma or a GED.” E 2

“And skill-really, all our entry level positions, you don’t really need any sort of skills. We do a lot of training.” E 8

“The lack of training and lack of education is a big barrier to the individual.” Employment Specialist (ES) 7

“I have one young adult now who...only finished the eighth grade.” ES 5

“The young adults-now...they’re getting told you can live a normal life and they’re told that now which is great. And yeah they think they can you know go to college. They can get a career. They can live a ‘normal’ life.” ES 12



Employment Services

“If I have any (problems), which I have [had] a few times, I’ll call them (ES) and talk to them...you know, explain to me to a point what’s going on and I’ll have an understanding of what’s going on and I can approach the person (employee) different than I am.” E 1

“I would say it’s just getting more of a relationship with the agencies that are referring the people. Knowing they can support, knowing how they can help you.” E 2

“If in that comprehensive assessment interview shows that they’re interested in work then I would get involved, set up a time to meet with them about what their experience have been with work, some of the barriers they may face, some of the symptoms they may experience, and how we can help them overcome those symptoms in order to function on a job.” ES 5



Action Steps

- Education/Training, Work Experience, Soft Skills and Work Habits
- Individual Placement Supports
- Supported Education Programs
- Educate Employers on Stigma



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