Career Development for Adults Living with Mental Illness

Mark Belluardo-Crosby, LMHC
Jessica Cimini, M.Ed., CRC, CAGS
Erica Johnson, MS, CRC

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INTRODUCTION

In 1995, Carmardese and Youngman from Center House, Inc. in Boston, Massachusetts surveyed 100 homeless adults living with a mental illness (Camardese & Youngman, 1996). They found that these individuals desired to return to work and school. The individuals surveyed were able to articulate attainable work goals and knew the type of education or training they would need in order to pursue these goals. One third of the sample stated that they would like to return directly to work. "Approximately 85% indicated a desire for more education (literacy, basic math and English, GED preparation, and/or supported education services), while 59% indicated that they eventually wished to have access to college-level learning opportunities (Camardese & Youngman, 1996)." Over 60% indicated a desire to have technical or vocational training or other training programs that would lead to human service jobs.

Persons living with severe psychiatric disabilities face many challenges when striving towards their vocational or educational goals. Various models of supported education and supported employment exist, though few provide integration. Programs have emphasized obtaining a job or attending school, but what is often missed in this split is the development of careers. It is essential to focus on both simultaneously. This paper suggests a unique model of career development where supported employment and supported education exist together. Education leads to employment, and employment goals are related to one's educational desires and background. An integrated program provides the opportunity for participants to link their educational and employment goals. Consumers can explore their career options, obtain the required education, and seek employment in their chosen field. Having one service provider assisting with both areas

helps consumers. It provides consistency, stability, and focus that leads to positive, long-term outcomes.

Supported Employment: While various forms of supported employment existed long before this time, in 1986 the Federal Rehabilitation Amendments included adults with a mental illness in the definitions of supported employment. Before then, the law applied only to adults with developmental disabilities. Traditional vocational services progressed continually from day habilitation services to day and work activities to sheltered work and finally to job placement and competitive employment. With the implementation of the supported employment model, people with psychiatric disabilities began directly entering the work force, as programs shifted from a train-place-support to a place-train-support system (Hursh, 1999). The program focus lay within providing ongoing supports and integration into a normalizing, competitive arena. Federal legislation identified the core components of supported employment to be "competitive work, integrated work setting, and ongoing support" (Marrone, 1993). Supported employment was specifically defined as "competitive work in integrated work settings for individuals with severe handicaps for whom employment has not occurred or has been interrupted or intermittent who need ongoing support services" (ICI).

Several forms of supported employment have been utilized to assist people with disabilities to achieve competitive working goals. Advantages of these supported employment models consist of: socialization opportunities, opportunities to work in normative business settings, greater diversity of employment options, improved equal access to the employment market, enhanced learning and transfer of critical job skills, job placement outcomes, productivity, and economic self-sufficiency (Hursh, 1999). Factors

attributing to the success of such programs revolve around the dedication to consumer empowerment and individual choice, strong commitment to achieving outcomes, and an ability to market services and respond to the needs of consumers and stakeholders (Barker,1994). Supported employment also carries the flexibility and structure to meet the needs of consumers to ensure success on the job. A key element in the model's success comes from matching jobs to individuals' specific interests and skills, an integral component of effective vocational rehabilitation that many people often overlook (McDonell, Nofs, & Hardman, 1989).

Though the supported employment model as a whole has contributed to a number of successes, many of the jobs people obtained have been in areas of unskilled, entry-level jobs. This has often meant moving from job to job. Many consumers carry limited job skills and work histories, often because the onset of their psychiatric disability interrupted their educational and vocational training and development. As part of the normalizing process, people with psychiatric disabilities want to seek higher, more skilled positions and establish substantial careers, instead of transitioning from job to job.

Supported Education: The supported education model, which follows the psychosocial rehabilitation structure, began in response to the need for training and education in order to achieve higher skilled jobs. In addition, people with mental illness experienced a growing desire for post-secondary education and knew that they could obtain it. Historically, consumers feared discrimination and failure if they strived for further, advanced education, and they felt that their needs for support were often unmet. Supported education was designed to provide the necessary assistance, preparation, and supports in pursuing higher educational goals. It also offered consumers the opportunity

to adopt a more positive self-definition and the role of a student as opposed to consumer of mental health services (Mowbray, Collins, & Bybee, 1999). Supported education has been defined as "the provision of post-secondary education in integrated educational settings for people with psychiatric disabilities whose education has been interrupted, intermittent, or has not yet occurred because of a severe psychiatric disability, and who, because of this psychiatric impairment, need ongoing support services in order to be successful in the education environment" (Sullivan, Nicolellis, Danley, & Macdonald-Wilson, 1993).

Programs have employed different models of supported education services, and some of the most common include: 1)a self-contained classroom where students engage in separate classes that have specialized curriculums; 2)an on-site model where students have classes and obtain supports from the educational staff members on-site; and 3)a mobile support model where students attend regular classes while receiving support from staff members of mental health agencies (Collins, Bybee, & Mowbray, 1998). Some of the benefits of following the supported education model include the immersion into normalizing social and interpersonal environments; enhancement of basic educational competencies; exploration and development of individual vocational interests; access to leisure, recreational, and cultural resources, and ongoing support from staff and peers.

Research studies have conveyed that supported education contributes to positive outcomes, such as educational attainment, employment, and increased self-esteem (Collins et. al, 1998). It also seeks to help consumers with improved long-term vocational outcomes by engaging them in advanced education and training, with the potential for skilled jobs that may offer more longevity, stability, and benefits, as well as

less stress (Mowbray et. al, 1999). Similar to supported employment, supported education programs have also generated positive outcomes, yet consumers still struggle to obtain and maintain stable vocational placements.

Integration of Education and Employment: Although both supported education and supported employment programs have usually been offered as separate entities, they are very similar in terms of the services. Both are community-based, emphasize and meet consumer needs on a unique individual basis, occur in consumer's natural environment, and collaborate with community resources to enable consumer integration into mainstream educational and employment arenas (Egnew, 1993). Having the services integrated and community-based presents several advantages to the consumers: 1) it maximizes choice, increases competency, and offers unconditional support; 2) focus is on client goals, not strictly on service system goals; 3) focus is on the client's perceived needs for assistance; 4) focus is on the preferred level of intervention; and 5) there exists the vision of consumer involvement and growth in the community (Barker, 1994). Keeping the services separate limits the effectiveness of each program and the benefits that persons living with mental illness can attain. An integrated program allows each aspect to serve as a counterpart to the other, to link one goal to another one, and offer an extensive continuum of choices and services (Egnew, 1993).

Career Development: In this paper, we will illustrate further the effectiveness of engaging in an integrated supported education and supported employment program. We present the case for a Career Development Model. First, we will outline the program model based on the SEE (Services for Education and Employment) Model. Second, we will examine how vocational evaluation enhances this model. Lastly, we will illustrate

how the program services and the vocational evaluation afford a successful job development strategy with positive employment outcomes.

PROGRAM DESIGN

Center House, Inc. of Boston, Massachusetts studied the results from surveying the 100 homeless mentally ill adults and designed a program to meet the needs expressed in the research. They applied for and received a three-year Special Projects Demonstration Grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (R.S.A.) of the Department of Education. The goal of this project would be to craft a program that would deliver career services to homeless adults with a mental illness through the program Career Advancement Resources. In addition, 51% of the program participants would come from the Empowerment Zone of Boston, a section of the city targeted to receive resources to address economic, human development, physical, and environmental needs.

The program structure is designed to ensure individualized services directed to meet the needs of each program participant. Program staff work with a case-load of program participants and each staff is a part of a team that meets weekly to coordinate service delivery and to share resources. The services are organized around a series of "Career Steps to Success." While there are several steps along the path towards education and/or job training and employment, it is clear that some participants want the speediest possible entry into employment.

Integration of Education and Employment: Of paramount importance to this project is the integration of education and employment under one roof. As stated in our review of the literature above, there are a plethora of supported education program models and numerous supported employment programs, but it is difficult to find these two contained

in one fluid program model. This allows us to see career services from the consumers' point of view, to see work and education in the context of their lives and in the context of a long-term view. The program staff are all Career Development Specialists, receiving training in providing both types of services

Program location and mobility: The main location of the program is in a suite of offices located in downtown Boston. Another office is located in a neighboring city. While most program participants come to the office locations to access an array of services, some participants are provided these services at locations where they feel more comfortable. The staff are available to meet in local coffee shops, neighborhood libraries, and provide job development services in the participant's community.

Array of Services: Once a program participant is assigned to a staff person, the first step is to explore and discuss the career goals. A Career Vita is used in this process of open and creative exploration, looking at past work experiences as well as hopes and dreams for the future. Using information gathered from this process, a step by step plan is formulated toward reaching the desired goal. Participants are engaged in the process so that each step includes action items for the staff person as well as the participant.

Relationships based on respect and dignity: Marone points out that no matter what the model, the success of program outcomes are largely due to relationships between staff and participants based on mutual respect and dignity (Marrone, 1993). Each person that comes to Career Advancement Resources is provided a professional setting in which to explore and achieve their vocational and career goals. In addition, program staff work in partnership with program participants, valuing them as individuals and holding the hope for them when they need encouragement.

Assertive, Ongoing Outreach and Supports: One of the strengths of this model devoted exclusively to the pursuit of education and employment, is the ability to reach out to individuals who may need additional or more intensive encouragement and support. Included in this effort is regular contact with case managers, residential workers, family members and/or anyone else the participant has given us permission to contact within their circle of caregivers.

Leveraging Community Resources: One of the philosophical foundations of this program model is that services are provided in the community wherever and whenever possible. We provide some training and vocational classes at our office, but most of our effort is focussed on integration and connection to community resources.

The following are some key components of the SEE services:

- An Employment/Education Computer Resource Center located in downtown Boston where group and individual services are provided including: job search, internet access, resume writing, computer based curriculum, etc. . .
- Career-oriented vocational and educational planning focusing on consumer strengths, skills, preferences and support needs.
- Intensive and ongoing outreach and engagement services designed for each individual.
- Rapid job placement into a wide range of part and full time employment opportunities based on consumer preferences.
- Access to a full range of community educational programming including job skills training programs, college, GED preparation, Adult Basic Education, ESL programs and technical training programs.

- Tuition Assistance, tutoring and supportive services provided on campus.
- Mobile support services and individualized job coaching at job sites, college campuses, and mainstream employment and education programs. Community support services will work towards developing peer and natural supports.
- Social Security benefits counseling.

Since Bay Cove/Center house began its SEE services in 1994, there are now 22 programs like this throughout the State of Massachusetts. It is a very flexible model that allows individualized services based on the needs of the particular participant. It does not require extensive overhead because many of the services may be provided in community settings. In addition, it is a program that is able to effectively leverage community resources.

Job Development: "Successful job development for people with disabilities is about meeting the specific and unique needs of each job seeker" (Condon, Enin-Donovan, Gilmore, Jordan, 2004). Career Advancement Resources trains all Career Development Specialists to deliver job development services, but employs one "expert" whose main role is to develop partnerships and jobs with employers in the Greater Boston area. Similar to our vocational evaluations and program philosophy, the job developer looks to create jobs that will allow a job seeker to gain skills and have the opportunity to advance within the company. The job developer looks for companies with growth potential, which we feel mutually benefits the job seeker and the employer. This is a major selling point for both as well, as the job seeker is moving in a direction of a career path and the employer has the luxury of a team player and one which will give the employer

longevity. The job developers main philosophical premise is to locate and secure job opportunities for individuals consistent with the preferences outlined in their career/rehabilitation plans. Other job duties are as follows:

- Serve as a resource to employers regarding ADA issues
- Represent program at various business, community and educational sights as necessary
- Maintain employer contact for support and training issues
- Perform occasional job coaching and employer check-ins in support of Career Development Specialists
- Develop and maintain business contacts in order to develop relationships that can be utilized for employment opportunities
- Update ACT database on a regular basis to keep accurate track of contacts and placements
- Obtain a minimum of 5 jobs per month

One of the specialized services that the job developer provides is to carve out positions for job seekers who have difficulty multi-tasking or who have limited work skills. The job developer works with employers to help them create new positions where company tasks may not be getting done efficiently or effectively, while capitalizing on the job seekers strengths and work skills. Another tactic is to take tasks from existing jobs and combine them to one job that fits the skills of the job seeker and frees up other employees to take on more work. Carving with employers is a very difficult and time consuming task, as many employers are resistant to it. In our experience, employers who have

worked with us have found it to be beneficial to their company and have appreciated the extra training and support from our staff, as well as the hard work of the employee.

Career Advancement Resources has a two track system of job development; independent and job development tracks. Job seekers on the independent track work primarily with the Career Development Specialists in their job search and use the job developer as a resource for job leads. These individuals usually have a work history, no long-term gap in employment and no major barriers to employment. They are encouraged to be as independent as they prefer to be and the staff in most instances do not make themselves visible to employers. Most of the staff's work is to support behind the scenes, by interview coaching, help with identifying job leads and encouragement to keep following through on the job search. Individual job seekers consult with the job developer as needed.

Job seekers on the job development track work closely with both the Job Developer and Career Development Specialists. These individuals may have very limited work history, large gaps in employment or very sporadic short-term jobs, and/or have barriers to employment. These barriers to employment include serious criminal offenses that an employer will have information on, large work gaps or sporadic short-term jobs, no work references, poor interview skills, or very limited English language skills. The job developer will often interface with the employer on behalf of the job seeker to establish a connection. The job developer will attend interviews with the job seeker as requested by the individual and will be available to help explain some of the barriers to the employer. In the case of limited English skills, the job developer partners with the bilingual Career Development Specialist's for translation, training and support. The job

developer may just do the work to get this person in the door for an interview and provide follow-up with the employer afterwards. Career Advancement Resources has many existing long-term relationships with employers in which we try to place individuals from the job development track. This group of employers are very valuable to the program as they have been used for informational interviews, situational assessments and for labor market research that we need for vocational evaluations.

Without creative job development services, there is little need for the rest of the work that the program provides. Employment is the goal and quality job development is the means by which we reach this goal.

Evaluations in the SEE Program Model:

The SEE model, as described earlier, is enhanced by the evaluation services that we offer to participants, specifically those that are referred by the state vocational rehabilitation agency. In FY04 and FY05, Career Advancement Resources conducted 53 evaluations, in which 43 individuals completed. These evaluations are driven by consumer choice and are a process of discovery instead of focusing on an assessment process. Every evaluation is customized to each participant and can last between one to two months, but the schedule is flexible. This evaluation procedure is not test intensive and feedback is given throughout the process. The evaluation does not only take place in CAR's offices, but also in other settings, as mobile services are offered. Short term as well as long term goals are developed by the completion of the evaluation.

Our vocational evaluation process begins with an emphasis on consumer choice. During the first meeting of the evaluation, participants are asked why they are interested in completing this evaluation, what they are hoping to gain, and what, if any, job goals

they have. The next steps of the evaluation are decided by what the participants' responses were to these questions during the intake. At this point, the evaluation can either focus on career exploration, or else a review of past work experiences. The participant can request at any time to change the schedule of meetings, or to not engage in a particular activity, such as a situational assessment. If the stated reason for this request is a feeling of discomfort and anxiety around the experience, then a discussion relating this to an actual work situation takes place. Therefore, although the assessment may not have been completed, it could still be a useful tool in understanding barriers and abilities.

We present the evaluation as a process of discovery, one that does not only focus on skills, but also interests and past experiences. Participants who have previously experienced a traditional vocational evaluation are now asked to engage in more conversation and discovery activities. We do not focus solely on participants' presentation and behaviors, skills assessment outcomes, and various inventories and tests. Instead, we review feedback and observations throughout the evaluation period, so as to gain insight into the participant's reactions to the evaluator's observations and results. This also allows a broader understanding of past barriers to successful employment, and vocational interests and skills that might not have been utilized before.

This is a customized process, designed to meet the vocational needs of the participant. If the participant is able to state a vocational interest during intake, then the focus is placed on exploring that job area. Some examples of the resources that are used for this are the O*Net website, informational interviews, and situational assessments. The information that is compiled consists of specific duties and tasks involved in the

chosen jobs, the work environment, required education, and previous work experience necessary. At this time, the Career VITA is utilized to begin exploring the participants' own work history.

In the VITA, participants are asked to choose the job they would consider to be the best one they have worked at, their worst job, and finally another job they have held (if any), and then give detailed examples of what they liked and disliked about each job and why. This often proves to be a good indicator of the possible barriers to be expected. If a theme emerges of why past jobs were not successful, then we can begin to work on accommodations and supports that might assist in overcoming the presenting barrier to successful employment. The outcomes of our reports show that participants of the evaluations may need support in the areas of social interactions at work. They also need support in the job search process, but are often able to perform the essential functions of a job with little or no coaching.

Although typical vocational evaluations generally last just a few consecutive days, this SEE program tends to conduct evaluations over the course of at least a month, meeting 1-2 times a week for approximately an hour. This schedule is flexible, and can be arranged with the participant in the first meeting in order to accommodate therapy and medical appointments.

In completing the evaluation, we offer mobile services in order to reach those participants who, for various reasons, are not able to come to our office in downtown Boston. This mobility has allowed us to work with people of all ages, including students who are completing high school and are exploring work options for when they graduate. We schedule meetings around the school schedule and often coordinate with school

counselors. We have also been able to offer services to those whose psychiatric disabilities interfere with travel on public transportation, or are exacerbated by tall city buildings and noisy atmospheres.

The focus of this process is on developing a job goal to be pursued at the conclusion of the evaluation. However, long term goals are also discussed. This is because the participant needs to return to work for financial reasons, but may desire to pursue a training program or college education to eventually move to a better job or career. Therefore, it is encouraged during the evaluation to discuss where the short term goal could lead, and how it could be helpful in attaining a long term goal.

The final report is broken down into six sections: Reason for Referral; Educational Background; Vocational Experience; Barriers to Employment; Evaluation; and Recommendations. The first section, Reason for Referral, includes both the referring counselor's and participant's reasons for completing the evaluation. Educational background and vocational experiences are self-reported, and include any high school and/or college, as well as the resume. Barriers to employment contains information that has been reviewed with the client prior to the report being written. The recommendation usually corresponds with the participants stated interest, either pursuing a job search in the developed goal area, or to pursue training. Occasionally a participant has discovered after completing this evaluation that he/she is not ready to job search, or return to work. Participating in the evaluation has helped him/her realize that more recovery time is needed.

This SEE program's evaluations are based on consumer choice and discovery, with an individualized and flexible process. The procedure we employ is not test-

intensive, and offers feedback throughout. Mobile services are offered to reach those who are not able to come to our offices. The evaluation usually ends with the participant having developed both a short term and long term vocational and/or educational goal.

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