

# **Advancing Customized Employment (ACE): Building Careers for People with Disabilities Via One-Stop Centers**

*A Collaboration of:*

**The Chicago Workforce Board, Chicago One-Stop Centers,  
Thresholds, Inc., & The University of Illinois at Chicago Center for  
Mental Health Services Research and Policy**

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# Advancing Customized Employment (Project ACE):

- ➔ Funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (DOL ODEP)
- ➔ Designed to enrich the capacity of local One-Stops to provide customized employment (CE) services to people with psychiatric disabilities who are not regularly targeted for services by the One-Stop Center system
- ➔ *A Collaboration of:*
  - The Chicago Workforce Board
  - Chicago One-Stop Centers
  - Thresholds, Inc.
  - The Center for Mental Health Services Research & Policy, University of Illinois at Chicago

# Principles Underlying the ACE Project

- ➔ People with psychiatric disabilities are a significant and untapped workforce resource for Chicago employers and businesses.
- ➔ Everyone in the community benefits when people with psychiatric disabilities are included in the workforce.
- ➔ Collaborative efforts bring together existing expertise where it is needed:
  - Establishing outreach and partnerships
  - Modifying policies and practices
  - Providing training and education

# Disability & Employment in the U.S.

- ➔ Approximately 53 million Americans of all ages have a disability; about 2/3 of these disabilities are severe (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003).
- ➔ Census Bureau data show that only about 30% of working age adults with severe disabilities are working.
- ➔ People with disabilities are much more likely to live in poverty than the general population.

# Disability & Employment: Myths & Facts

- ⇒ **MYTH:** Hiring employees with disabilities increases workers' compensation insurance rates.
- ⇒ **FACT:** Insurance rates are based solely on the relative hazards of the operation & the organization's accident history, not on whether workers have disabilities.
- ⇒ **MYTH:** Employees with disabilities have a higher absentee rate than employees without disabilities.
- ⇒ **FACT:** Studies by firms such as DuPont show no difference between the absentee rates of employees with & without disabilities.

(Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy)

# Disability & Employment: Myths & Facts

- ➔ **MYTH:** People with disabilities cannot meet performance standards & are poor employment risks.
- ➔ **FACT:** A 1990 study by DuPont found that 90% of employees with disabilities were rated “average” or “better than average” in job performance. This is similar to results found in 1981 & 1973.
- ➔ **MYTH:** Considerable expense is necessary to accommodate workers with disabilities.
- ➔ **FACT:** Studies by the Department of Labor have shown that 15% of accommodations cost nothing, and over half (51%) cost between \$1 and \$500. These costs can be offset by business incentives including tax credits and deductions.

# The Facts about Mental Illness and Work

- ➔ There are over 3 million working age adults with psychiatric disabilities of whom 70% to 90% are not employed
- ➔ Psychiatric disability is the largest single diagnostic category among working-age persons receiving Social Security Administration SSDI/SSI disability benefits (27%/36% as of 2001).
- ➔ Studies have shown that the great majority of people with serious mental illness want to work
- ➔ A diagnosis of serious mental illness is not a reliable indicator that someone cannot work
- ➔ Rehabilitation programs have shown that they are able to place more than 50% of clients with mental illness into paid employment

# More Facts about Mental Illness and Work

- ➔ Work reduces the use of costly mental health services and hospitalizations
- ➔ On-the-job accommodations are relatively straightforward and inexpensive (flexible schedule, job sharing, job coach)
- ➔ People with mental illness work at all kinds of jobs in the labor market
- ➔ Employers who have hired persons with serious mental illness are generally very positive about their experiences
- ➔ Job loss is reduced with the provision of supports from rehabilitation agencies

# Facts About People with Psychiatric Disabilities in the Chicago Community

- ➔ Almost 75,000 (~4% of Chicago population) have mental disabilities according to 2000 Census
- ➔ Chicago-area unemployment rate is 6.1%, but 77% of people with psychiatric disabilities are not working (2003)
- ➔ Numerous studies (e.g., Government Accounting Office) have shown that state vocational rehabilitation programs have difficulty meeting the unique needs of people with psychiatric disabilities
- ➔ State and local mental health agencies typically are unable to offer employment services to clients

# Employers of People with Psychiatric Disabilities Report:

- ⇒ equal levels of productivity
- ⇒ high levels of commitment to working
- ⇒ strong desire to prove they can do the job
- ⇒ ability to interact well with co-workers
- ⇒ loyal, dependable employees
- ⇒ positive, supportive reactions from co-workers
- ⇒ ease of accommodating mental health disabilities

(Cook et al., 1993)

# Research Tells Us That:

- ➔ The most negative attitudes toward workers with mental health problems occur among those employers with NO EXPERIENCE or EXPOSURE to employees with these challenges.
- ➔ In studies comparing employers who have hired and supervised workers with mental health problems and those who have not, the former are significantly more positive about the capabilities of these workers .
- ➔ This shows how...

**“Familiarity breeds respect”**

# So, what's the problem?

- ⇒ we need to get more people with mental health disabilities into the labor force
- ⇒ we need to make more employers aware of this group as an untapped labor supply

# How do we do these two things?

- ⇒ bring the labor supply to the employers
- ⇒ prepare and support employers who are seeking a high-quality workforce that includes people with psychiatric disabilities

# What are some solutions?

## *Workers need...*

- ⇒ jobs that fit their interests and abilities
- ⇒ a chance to complete their education and training in order to acquire higher level job skills
- ⇒ jobs that replace the financial and medical benefits that are lost as they move up the career ladder
- ⇒ occasional supports and accommodations (like all workers) that are often low-impact and low-cost

# Other solutions?

## *Employers need...*

- ➔ *Direct exposure* to workers coping with mental health problems
  - employers report positive reactions from direct contact through internships, job try-outs, etc.
- ➔ *Direct support from service providers* who work with those who have mental health disabilities
  - someone to call with questions or concerns
  - problem-solving support
- ➔ Opportunities to *interact and network* with *other employers*
  - opportunities to convince new employers to hire, and to provide existing employers with support and positive reinforcement

# *Why Customized Employment (CE)?*

- ➔ CE promotes employment of people with significant disabilities in full time employment that: pays greater than minimum wage, provides benefits, & offers opportunities for skill development & career growth.
- ➔ CE places people with significant disabilities into non-stereotypical jobs in integrated, inclusive work settings.
- ➔ CE applies individualized, person-centered job development strategies
- ➔ CE facilitates “natural supports” for workers on the job
- ➔ CE provides employers with assistance and advice
- ➔ CE builds strong, enduring business partnerships
- ➔ CE offers consumer choice re: job opportunities and ensures consumer satisfaction

# ACE Project Goals

- Develop strategic planning and implementation activities to make customized employment (CE) services widely available at One-Stop Centers
- Develop CE job opportunities for One-Stop Center customers with psychiatric disabilities
- Develop capacity of One-Stop Centers to serve people with psychiatric disabilities
- Develop local and state-level interagency collaboration to increase employment of people with psychiatric disabilities
- Enhance involvement of employers, trade and community-based organizations to increase employment of people with psychiatric disabilities

# ACE Project Partners

- ➔ The Chicago Workforce Board and One-Stop Center Partners are already providing employment services in the community
- ➔ UIC Center for Mental Health Services Research and Policy has extensive, nationally-recognized experience with the research and practice of employing people with psychiatric disabilities
- ➔ Thresholds, Inc. is the largest and longest-running employment service provider for people with psychiatric disabilities in Chicago

# ACE: Year One Activities

- ➔ Form 3 Advisory Councils
- ➔ Review current policies and procedures
- ➔ Conduct 6 focus groups with staff, clients, employers and others
- ➔ Assess One-Stop staff training and service needs
- ➔ Deliver on-site training to One-Stop staff
- ➔ Begin CE services at 2 One-Stop Centers
- ➔ Develop client and employer outreach and marketing plans
- ➔ Develop strategic plans
- ➔ Begin sustainability planning
- ➔ Apply for Employment Network status
- ➔ Evaluate 1st year activities

# ACE Advisory Councils

- ➔ *Council One*: Policy Review and Sustainability Strategic Planning Council
- ➔ *Council Two*: Customized Employment Outreach and Advocacy Council
- ➔ *Council Three*: Customized Employment Curriculum and Education Council

# Summary

- ➔ This is a project whose time has come (especially given the recently published *President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health Report* and federal emphasis on work & psychiatric disability)
- ➔ The project partners have have national reputations in their respective areas of expertise
- ➔ This project provides the CWFB with an opportunity to become a leader in this area
- ➔ Project activities have the potential to create a more diverse, skilled, & productive workforce in the City of Chicago and throughout the state of Illinois