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

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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.

(Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy)
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