

Podcast Transcript for Seeking Supported Employment

LR: Hello. My name is Dr. Lisa Razzano. I'm here with Dr. Judith Cook, Director of the University of Illinois at Chicago Center on Integrated Health Care and Self-Directed Recovery. Today, we'll be talking about the self-determination tool called, *Seeking Supported Employment*, which is available from the UIC Solutions Suite.

LR: Thanks for joining me today, Judith. Before we talk about the tool, could you tell our listeners what supported employment is?

JC: Sure Lisa. Supported employment is a service that helps people find and keep jobs in order to build successful careers. But not just any jobs. Supported employment programs help people get competitive jobs. By competitive, we mean jobs that anyone can apply for, not just people with disabilities. They're also jobs that pay at least minimum wage. If a program doesn't help you to land a competitive job, then it's not a supported employment program. These programs help you find an open position, and then, support you in applying for it and going through the interviewing and hiring process. Research shows that supported employment works better than other employment services, like sheltered workshops or transitional employment programs.

LR: I didn't know there were so many different kinds of employment programs. How do people tell the difference between them, and figure out which one is right for them?

JC: I was hoping you'd ask that question. *Seeking Supported Employment* describes these different kinds of employment programs and offers reasons you might or might not want to use each one. Then, for people who decide they want supported employment services, it helps them locate programs that provide high quality services.

LR: How does it help people assess the quality of vocational services offered by a program?

JC: People do this by scheduling a visit to the program so they can talk to the staff about what it offers. This is done to find out whether the program provides services that research has found to be effective in helping people return to work. They do this by asking a series of questions and noting the answers. First, they ask whether the program helps people get competitive jobs and whether it has experience working with job-seekers in mental health recovery. Next, they ask about whether people receive assistance in identifying the kinds of jobs they prefer, and what work settings they'd like to work in. Also asked about is whether people are helped to find their preferred jobs soon after joining the program rather than waiting months to start searching. Next, they ask about what kinds of help they'll get after they're hired, since programs that focus on helping people *keep* their jobs are more likely to help them stay employed. After visiting the program, users add up the score for each question to arrive at a total score. The score indicates whether the program meets the basic requirements of the supported employment model, and if so, the extent to which it offers other services that research shows are effective in promoting satisfying, long-lasting employment.

LR: Can you give us an idea of what some of the questions are?

JC: Sure. One of the first questions is: Does your program place clients in jobs that are permanent? Another question asks: What is the average amount of time people take to get a job in your program? A question at the end goes: Does your program help clients keep their jobs if they go into the hospital or need to take some time off for mental health reasons? The booklet also offers tips to prepare for the meeting and has a tear-out page if you want to send staff the questions ahead of time.

LR: Can you tell us more about what kinds of people might want to use this guide?

JC: We designed it for people who have a mental illness or who have found it hard to get and keep jobs because of stress or related issues. Many people with emotional problems want to work, but they may not feel capable of holding good jobs, due to prior negative work experiences or because they face stigma and discrimination in the workplace. Other people have found the workbook to be useful as well, including people with different types of disabilities and people wanting to return to the workforce after long periods of unemployment.

LR: Do most people use this tool on their own?

JC: *Seeking Supported Employment* is a self-guided workbook, but it also has been used by clients working with their service providers, and by groups of people in peer-run behavioral health programs, community mental health centers, and psychiatric rehabilitation programs. It can be used by any person or group that wants to learn more about different types of employment programs and what really works to help people in mental health recovery find and keep good jobs.

LR: Would you share one of your favorite stories about how the tool has been used?

JC: I'd be happy to. We heard from an Occupational Therapist who was working in a state mental hospital. She was running a group for patients who wanted to work after discharge and decided to use the workbook. She and the group members started by reading about the different types of employment programs that are available, and discussed which would work best for each person. Then they read the questions to learn what supported employment services are, and how to tell if a program is actually offering them. Next, they practiced reading the questions out loud to each other, to get comfortable asking them. Finally, the group leader helped people call and make appointments to visit employment programs a month after discharge. She also made herself available by phone in case they needed extra support for their program visits.

LR: What a great use of the tool! Thanks for sharing this valuable information, Judith. And thank you all for listening. We are pleased to offer *Seeking Supported Employment* as part of our Solutions Suite to promote wellness and self-direction for people in recovery from mental health conditions.