

## **IPS Supported Employment Information for Program Participants and Their Family Members**

IPS stands for Individual Placement and Support. It is a type of employment program that has been well researched and is effective at helping people with regular jobs related to their interests. In this document, we use the term *program participants* for people who are considering a return to work, job seeking, pursuing education, or working. *Family* is used to denote family members and other close personal support people. *IPS specialists* are the practitioners who help people develop career plans, search for jobs, and succeed at work and school.

### Making decisions about employment

People feel better when they work. Jobs are a way to connect with others and jobs provide opportunities for people to use their skills. Employed people have someplace to go each day and higher incomes. Almost everyone reports that their self esteem improves when they are employed and there is some evidence that employment helps people manage mental health symptoms more effectively.

Some people consider applying for disability benefits rather than working. Or, they may hope to use benefits for a while and pursue work later on. But fewer than three percent of people who are awarded Social Security benefits in the U.S. ever go on to support themselves through work. That is problematic because people who are unemployed have more health problems, addictions, and mental health issues. An alternate strategy is to try work now. Experience different jobs to learn what you enjoy, what skills you have, and what type of long-term career you want. If you decide that you want to apply for disability benefits you can always do that later, but try work first.

### Engaging in IPS services

Each person decides for herself when it is the right time to work. In other words, mental health and IPS specialists should not discourage people from pursuing employment. A person is not excluded if a person has trouble remembering appointments, if she uses drugs or alcohol, has mental health problems, is homeless, has legal issues, or any other problem. The desire to work helps people overcome many different barriers to employment. And IPS specialists can also help program participants consider different approaches to achieve their goals.

*Every person who is interested in work or school is eligible for IPS.*

IPS programs do not require people to complete short-term jobs (job tryouts), volunteer jobs, or work assessments, to prepare for employment. Everyone has abilities that employers will appreciate. IPS specialists simply help people discover what jobs are good matches for their skills and interests. Participants learn which jobs they perform well the same way everyone else does—by going to work.

### Getting started in IPS

When someone is interested in getting a job or planning for a career, he should be referred to IPS immediately. An IPS specialist will ask about his interests, what type of workplace sounds attractive, what hours he is available to work, whether he would like help with school or training programs, and so forth. The participant and IPS specialist may also ask family members to share their ideas about good job matches. If the participant receives mental health services, the IPS specialist will suggest asking mental health practitioners about the participant's strengths, skills, past work experiences, and what jobs he may enjoy.

Typically, within a few weeks of meeting each other, the IPS specialist and the participant will begin taking action on the person's goals. Based on the person's preferences, they may begin searching for a job, learning about educational or training programs, or investigating different types of employment. Examples of what they may work on together are listed below:

- Submitting job applications and resumes
- Following up on job applications by visiting businesses to speak with a manager
- Going to community colleges to learn what programs are available
- Visiting General Educational Development (GED) programs to learn what classes are like
- Interviewing people who work in different fields to learn what their jobs are like
- Observing people working in different occupations

### Finding regular jobs

IPS specialists help participants find regular, paid jobs for which anyone can apply. Examples include cooking in a commercial kitchen, ushering at a playhouse, working with computer software, grooming dogs, cleaning offices, caring for children in a daycare center, landscaping, working in a factory, etc. The types of jobs participants obtain depend on their qualifications for different types of work and the jobs available in their communities. Jobs may be part or full time.

### Sharing personal information with employers or teachers

Each program participant decides for herself whether to share personal information with employers and teachers. Examples of what may be shared include having mental health symptoms, different learning styles, living in housing programs, or receiving services from an IPS program. It is possible to ask an IPS specialist to share some information, but not everything. For example, one person asked his IPS specialist to introduce him to employers. He said it would be okay to explain that he received mental health treatment

but he did not want his IPS specialist to tell employers information about his diagnosis or symptoms.

Some IPS participants decide to share personal information in some situations, but not in others. A student may ask an IPS specialist to meet with his instructor and himself to talk about learning problems and to ask for extra credit work. But that same student may not want his IPS specialist to talk to his employer.

The IPS specialist should ask each person about his preferences about what information should be kept private. She can provide examples of what she would say to employers so that the participant can respond with what he likes or does not like. And participants can change their minds about disclosing private matters at any time. For example, a working person who did not want his specialist to talk to employers during the job search may decide that it is okay for the specialist to talk to his employer after he is working. Or a jobseeker may decide to share information with some hiring managers, but not others.

### Selecting job supports

IPS specialists can provide different types of assistance to working people based on their needs and preferences. Some examples include wake-up calls, getting together to talk about the job, meetings with supervisors to discuss how the job is going, help getting clothing for work, learning the bus system together, occasional rides to work, help reviewing orientation materials, assistance learning a new job, help asking for a different work schedule or different work duties (employers may, or may not, agree), family meetings to talk about the job, help reporting income to entitlement systems, and assistance moving onto a new job. Because working people have less time to meet, IPS specialists try to make supports convenient by offering to meet working people at their homes, getting together at coffee shops, or talking while they give a worker a ride to her job. Each worker decides for herself how long she would like job supports, but IPS specialists typically provide supports for about a year.

*Job supports are based on each working person's preferences.*

When jobs end, the participant and IPS specialist talk about what went well and what (if anything) did not. They may include family members in these discussions based on the participant's preferences. The purpose is to learn what would be a better job match. Would the person prefer a work shift that starts later in the day? Would it be better to have a job that includes more or less interaction with others? What did the person like most about the job? Least? What job supports would have been better? Next, the IPS specialist and participant begin looking for another job based on what was learned. Some people try several jobs to learn what they like and what they want to do.

### Considering educational supports

IPS specialists can also provide help with education and training goals that are related to a person's career goals. The types of educational programs for which they provide supports include high school, general education development (GED) programs, community colleges, vocational training programs, and four-year colleges.

High school students in the U.S. may benefit from asking an IPS specialist to attend their Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings. The IPS specialist can help the student with setting up a study schedule, learning good study skills, finding a weekend or summer job, and planning for transition from high school to work or post secondary education.

IPS specialists help young people and their families learn about different post secondary educational programs by visiting schools together and meeting with advisors or instructors. They also assist with applications for financial aid, school applications and other steps to get started in school. Once a person is enrolled, specialists offer assistance in keeping track of assignments and test schedules, learning good study skills, locating tutoring services, and talking with instructors, as needed.

### Learning more about IPS supported employment

Go to [www.ipsworks.org](http://www.ipsworks.org)