Practices Differentiating High-Performing from Low-Performing Supported Employment Programs

Article Summary:

Gowdy, Carlson, and Rapp (2003) report on a qualitative study that describes practices that differentiate programs with high rates of competitive employment from those with low rates. The programs studied were located in Kansas and provided employment services to adults with severe and persistent mental illness. The Kansas Consumer Status Reporting System was used to select the high performing and low performing programs. The state average for consumers engaged in competitive employment for the two-year study period (FYs 97 and 98) was 23%. The five high performing programs had competitive employment outcomes on average 8.9% above the state average; the average competitive employment outcomes for the four low performing programs were 6.4% below the average state outcome.

The study found 13 differentiating factors in three areas between the high performing and low performing programs. These areas are: building consumer interest in working; getting a job; and maintaining a job. One of the differentiating areas in building consumer interest in work is the point in the process where the initial exposure to work occurs. For example, in the high performing programs, the consumers' exposure to work occurs early, frequently by the case manager during the intake process; in low performing programs, exposure to work rarely occurs early in the process. A case manager from a high performing program is quoted in the paper as saying, "You just go over it (work) and keep talking about it and at one point in time they begin to realize well, maybe I could do this." In contrast, a case manager from a low performing program is quoted as saying, "And with mine, they basically come to me. I let them; I don't pressure them about getting a job. It just adds more to their stress."

The paper notes that many of findings from this study for high performing programs are consistent with practices in the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model, such as a de-emphasis on pre-vocational programming, the use of rapid assessments, and providing individualized follow-along supports. The paper concludes by stating that high performing programs "possessed a higher opinion of the abilities, talents and spirit of their consumers than did the comparison sites."


Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal