



Mind Care Matters

Transcript – Supported Employment

Michelle:

Hello! My name is Michelle Zechner. I'm faculty at Rutgers, School of Health Professions at the Department of Psychiatric Rehabilitation and Counseling Professions. I've been helping people living with mental health conditions and their families for over 20 years, and one of my passions is learning about new services to help people recover from mental health issues. Welcome to Mind Care Matters, a podcast series dedicated to exploring new and innovative strategies to improve mental health. Today, I'm so delighted to be talking with my colleague, Joni Dolce.

Joni Dolce, MS, CRC is an assistant Professor and employment consultant with the Integrated Employment Institute at Rutgers Department of Psychiatric Rehabilitation and Counseling Professions where she has, for many years, worked in the behavioral health services, specifically Supported Employment, providing both direct services and Supported Employment program management. She's authored and co-authored several articles and presents nationally on a variety of employment related topics. Joni's been invited to present to human resource professionals on the topic of mental health in the workplace and is listed as a Society for Human Resource Management Recommended Speaker on this topic. Welcome Joni!

Joni:

Hi, Michelle! Thank you. I'm excited to be here. I think this series is wonderful, and I feel really honored that you asked me to be part of it, to talk about Supported Employment.

Michelle:

Oh, awesome! Yes, I'm so excited that you could join us today, and we are going to be talking about Supported Employment and the important role that work plays in mental health recovery.

So, I'm just going to start out by asking: What do you think mental health providers need to know about employment and Supported Employment?

Joni:

Michelle, I think if anything could come out of this brief podcast we're doing now is the idea that providers can be encouraging individuals to return to work, work is positive. There have been numerous studies showing and supporting the positive benefits of employment, including improvements in self-esteem, improvements in housing stability, improvements in overall quality of life and many more. Providers can support individuals in their recovery by talking about employment, talking about careers, and really encouraging someone to consider returning to work if that's something the person hasn't thought of or doesn't feel that they're able to do. A provider can provide hope and optimism and really encourage someone to achieve the goal of employment or achieve a goal of education.

Michelle:

So, in a nutshell, I've seen some sayings that life is good, but in this case we could say that work is good. Work is good for the person, it's good for so many different areas of their life. I'd love to hear a little bit more. We mentioned the word Supported Employment, and our listeners may not know what that is.

Could you describe what Supported Employment is?

Joni:

Yes, Supported Employment is defined, technically, by the Rehab Act of 1986. They amended the Act to include Supported Employment and its definition is *competitive work in integrated work settings which are consistent with the interests and strengths and goals and informed choice of a job seeker*. Supported Employment uses a place train model of vocational services, which is contrasted to what was typically done prior to the Rehab Act amendments where individuals would go through lengthy assessments or other sheltered settings where they would work for noncompetitive pay, non-integrated settings, and possibly be helped into the community to obtain competitive employment. Many times, people would never move beyond those non-integrated settings so Supported Employment is really a beneficial service for many individuals, and it's been around, as I mentioned, for several years and more. Saying *recently*, is probably not accurate. But beyond the 1986 amendments to the Rehab Act, the individual placement and support model of Supported Employment was developed for persons with mental health conditions at that time, developed by Gary Bond, Robert Drake and Deborah Becker, and they've done lots and lots of research. Several studies that support the evidence for the individual placement support model of support and employment, and it and showing it's the superiority to those more sheltered step-wise types of vocational services.

Michelle:

Yes, that's so interesting. You know, I worked in a number of mental health settings and in one of my jobs I would visit people in sheltered workshops, and I was always sort of just stunned that a lot of people with degrees and a lot of skills we're doing things like sorting salt and pepper and I thought, *Oh,*

my goodness! But what you're suggesting is that IPS is really, you know, we used to think we have to prepare, prepare, prepare people to get a job. And now evidence is really suggesting that we want people to get the job and then support them around that job so that they keep the job.

Joni:

Yes, evidence supports that, and that evidence has been supporting the transition from a sheltered environment to competitive work for a number of years. However, providers in mental health services continue to express fear, concern and uncertainty about supporting individuals participating in services in their employment goals because of some of the barriers that are present; providers are concerned that people will get sick or may not be able to handle the stress of work, or maybe may lose certain benefits that they have if they return to work. And, because of those barriers, and because of the concerns that many providers and family members may present, employment is oftentimes not discussed in mental health agencies or behavioral health centers.

Michelle:

There are a lot of challenges to getting people to get back to work, including in some of our mental health centers, some of our staff may not feel confident in addressing some of these issues and also family members aren't necessarily as supportive. What are some things that we might be able to do, even if people aren't specially trained to support people going back to work?

Joni:

I think you really hit the nail on the head when you said many providers may not feel confident to be able to support individuals and I want to make that clear that providers aren't necessarily always believing that someone can't do it or have this negative attitude. That's certainly not what I'm suggesting, but it is more about maybe having the confidence to support individuals, addressing some of those barriers that we talked about and addressing some of the concerns. What I think is important in the field has moved to this direction is really helping behavioral health services to integrate employment and vocational services into their current settings, training many team members, not just the designated vocational person on the team, but training everyone to be part of providing employment services, talking about employment and education with individuals participating in services, sending that message of hope, being encouraging, being supportive. Those are certainly things that providers can be doing such as sending that message of hope, talking with people about what their dreams and what their goals are, and engaging in those discussions around what would my life look like if I was employed? What would my life look like in my other wellness areas? How would these things improve if I were to return to work or go back to school? So having those discussions with individuals participating in services to begin getting people engaged and interested and believing that employment is possible.

Michelle:

Yeah, yeah. Oh, I love that. I mean, you know, full disclosure. I am completely biased for all for Supported Employment. In my own family I have a family member with a mental health condition, who kept a goal of employment to motivate them, to overcome several relapses of their symptoms, and it was really the one thing that kept them engaged and motivated to work towards recovery. So, I am a firm believer in work as a way to improve one's recovery because I find that a lot of people really do want to work, that they can work, and you know we can support them in those goals. There's a funny saying, and I can never remember but it was sort of there early on in the in the psychiatric rehabilitation world. It's like people would say, *if work makes people sick, what does unemployment do*. Like any time you think about people that you have known who've gotten laid off or been told they're not good enough for a job, what does that do to your identity? I don't know Joni, do you have thoughts on this?

Joni:

Yes, you are mentioning Joe Maroni. So, he was a very early proponent, continues to promote employment, competitive employment, Supported Employment, and his saying was, I'm probably not getting this 100% accurate -*What if work makes people with mental illness sick? What does unemployment, social isolation and poverty cause?* And I think that says it all, right? Work contributes to people's self-esteem, financial needs are met, housing stability.

So, when you think about that statement, you really do understand that work helps us.

If you think about your own reasons for work, it is helpful. Work helps us access those other areas of wellness, right? Going to work helps us be more socially engaged and socially involved. It helps with our intellectual wellness. It supports our, of course, financial wellness, other areas, social wellness. So, I think that's an interesting quote to bring up Michelle. It really does say it all, really believing in someone supporting them, listening, being there to hear what the person's desires are, what their dreams are, and helping support them along that journey.

Michelle:

Yeah, yeah, that's so powerful. And you know the connections that you're talking about in the interrelationships between all these different areas for people, because for so many of us in the US, work becomes a sense of identity. I mean, it's not the only sense of identity, but often at parties I always joke like, what do you do? And when you're a mental health provider, you're like, what do you do? And you tell someone that you work in mental health, and it's like, oh, you can see the people run away from you, you know, but it is really sort of a sense of who we are, and it can build self-efficacy and give us structure, and financial support, and a sense, of purpose, and belonging for many of us working in mental health. We're really committed to this field because we care. And I think that a lot of people who want to go back to work with mental health conditions want to do their jobs because they have a sense of meaning and purpose as well and want to live that out. So, I'm all excited about this Joni. You really energized me. How can someone learn more about Supported Employment and some of the strategies they could try out?

Joni:

The developers that I mentioned, Gary Bond, Robert Drake, Deborah Becker, and others, they have a website called [lpsworks.org](https://www.lpsworks.org). All of these references and resources are in the podcast notes. They have tons of research that they've done, tons of resources in their library along with tools and strategies. I would suggest finding out additional information through their site. You can also go to [SAMHSA](https://www.samhsa.gov), [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](https://www.samhsa.gov/substance-abuse-and-mental-health-services-administration), has lots of resources on Supported Employment. Our [Integrated Employment Institute](https://www.integratedemploymentinstitute.org) through Rutgers School of Health Professions in the Department of Psych, Rehab also has a lot of upcoming trainings, resources, workbooks, and the like so you're welcome to visit our Integrated Employment Institute website and check that out. And if you are in our area and would like some targeted implementation support around implementing employment services in your behavioral health center you can certainly access that through our website as well. Michelle will have that included in the podcast notes. Thank you.

Michelle:

Thank you so much, Joni. All of those resources are free, and of course we have things on our own [Northeast and Caribbean MHTTC website](https://www.northeastandcaribbeanmhttc.org), which we'll make sure to point in our show notes as well. Well, Joni, I think our time has come to an end, but I am so grateful for your time. I learned so much. I got re-energized about employment. I really appreciate you and all the work that you've done.

Joni:

Thank you, Michelle. This was great, and I'm again so honored that you asked me to be part of your podcast series. Thank you.

Michelle:

Thank you.

This podcast is a production of the [Northeast and Caribbean Mental Health Technology Transfer Center](https://www.northeastandcaribbeanmhttc.org) at Rutgers, University and made possible by funding from the [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](https://www.samhsa.gov/substance-abuse-and-mental-health-services-administration).