



IPS FOR YOUNG ADULTS WITH SERIOUS MENTAL ILLNESS ISSUE BRIEF

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Overview

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is the evidence-based practice of supported employment for people with serious mental illness. The practice is effective for people of different ages, including young adults. While IPS is an individualized approach to assist people in gaining meaningful employment and career advancement, education and vocational certificate training are very relevant for young adults and therefore are incorporated into IPS services. Young adults frequently switch between working, attending school, or both. Recently there has been increased attention on first episode psychosis, which usually includes people who are at least 16 years old. In the United States, the Workforce Investment and Opportunities Act of 2014 defines the age range for transition-age youth as 16 to 24 years of age. In this issue brief, we review the literature and describe important components of IPS service delivery to young adults with serious mental illness.

Background

Young adulthood (16-24) is a critical developmental stage during which both employment and educational attainment are important factors predicting career advancement in future years. For high school juniors and seniors, working a competitive job (but less than 20 hours per week) while completing high school is associated with positive long-term career outcomes, although working more than 20 hours a week is associated with poorer educational performance (Stone, 2011). Conversely, young adults who are “not in education, employment or training” (NEET) over extended time periods experience “occupational scarring,” that is, poorer lifetime employment outcomes (Ralston, Feng, Everington, & Dibben, 2016).

Young adults with serious mental illness have goals that are similar to their peers in the general population. They desire to live as independently as possible, have relationships, and have meaningful structured activities, such as work and/or school (Ramsay et al., 2011). Yet unemployment rates among young adults with mental health conditions greatly exceed the general working-age population (Ramsay, Stewart, & Compton, 2012; Wagner & Newman, 2012). Young adults often value work and school above social relations, symptoms, side effects, such as decreased energy and concentration. Furthermore, baseline ratings of importance of work and school lead to work and school participation 12 months later (de Waal, Dixon, & Humensky, 2017). To achieve their employment and education goals, young adults with serious mental illness often benefit from professional help. IPS is the only vocational approach with

a strong evidence base showing effectiveness for adults with serious mental illness (Drake, Bond, & Becker, 2012; Marshall et al., 2014) including young adults (Bond, Drake, & Campbell, 2016).

Young adults experience barriers to receiving employment and education supports. Family members may worry that seeking employment or furthering education is stressful. Mental health agencies may not focus on recovery through work and education, instead focusing on medication management, symptom reduction and stability (Costa et al., 2017). Young adults with serious mental illness may not feel empowered to pursue these goals and drop out of services (de Haan, Boon, de Jong, Hoeve, & Vermeiren, 2013). Mental health professionals often view school as stressful and may discourage people from furthering their schooling (Ennals, Fossey, Harvey, & Killackey, 2014). Other barriers to education are psychiatric symptoms, inadequate finances (Manthey, Goscha, & Rapp, 2015), and perceived stigma and discrimination by faculty and students (Brockelman, Chadsey, & Loeb, 2006). Yet educational attainment is associated with higher lifetime earnings and other positive employment outcomes for people with serious mental illness (Luciano & Meara, 2014), mirroring the results in the general population (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; Vuolo, Mortimer, & Staff, 2016).

Supported education services are available in different settings, including, academic, mental health, and other settings. Although the research has not provided clear direction (Ringeisen et al., 2017), many IPS programs in the U.S. (Manthey, Holter, Rapp, Davis, & Carlson, 2012) as well as first episode psychosis programs worldwide (Azrin, Goldstein, & Heinssen, 2016; McGorry, Ratheesh, & O'Donoghue, 2018) have integrated supported education and supported employment (Nuechterlein et al., 2008).

IPS Organizational Structure

IPS programs serving young adults are structured the same as any other IPS program, except that they emphasize education. An IPS supervisor leads a unit of IPS specialists and conducts weekly team meetings to discuss client progress, job leads, and program outcomes. The IPS supervisor and IPS specialists use a strength-based approach when discussing the IPS caseload by focusing on the client's skills, strengths, talents and experiences. Team discussions emphasize solutions rather than problems. The IPS supervisor provides field mentoring for job development with all new IPS specialists until they demonstrate competencies and periodically thereafter. Similarly, they accompany IPS specialists to academic institutions to meet school counselors and staff.

Each IPS specialist joins one or two mental health treatment teams for 90% of their caseload. They attend and actively participate in weekly mental health treatment team meetings and have frequent contact with team members in order to provide coordinated services. The IPS supervisor attends a meeting for each treatment team quarterly to ensure that services are integrated.

A basic principle of IPS is that eligibility is based on client choice. People are not screened out because of psychiatric symptoms, substance use, legal involvement or other work readiness criteria. The agency promotes competitive integrated employment and mainstream education.

Core Principles of IPS Combining Employment and Education

IPS programs integrate service delivery of employment and education supports.

Zero exclusion for eligibility	All young adults with serious mental illness who are interested in work and school are eligible, regardless of symptoms, substance use, or other characteristics.
Mainstream competitive employment and education	The focus is on regular jobs and mainstream educational opportunities that are available to people based on their qualifications, rather than disability status or participation in social services.
Individual preferences and strengths	Services are based on participants' preferences and choices, rather than providers' judgments.
Integrated services	Team members provide employment and educational support through a team approach. IPS specialists participate in treatment team meetings to review and coordinate client progress.
Rapid job search and career exploration	Rapid job search and career/educational exploration begin soon after entry into IPS. IPS participants interested in school receive support in choosing a course of study and completing school and financing applications.
Job development and building partnerships with school counselors and staff	IPS specialists meet employers to learn about their business needs and hiring practices. They may give the information to job seekers or directly introduce qualified job seekers to employers, depending on the job seeker's preference. IPS specialists also meet with school counselors and academic advisors to learn about different education and training programs, accommodations, and financial aid.
Individualized and time-unlimited job and school supports	Team members provide individualized job and educational supports as long as needed and desired by program participants. Team members help participants consider natural supports, such as family members and friends. IPS specialists collaborate with staff from educational institutions.
Personalized benefits counseling	IPS participants are offered personalized benefits counseling to learn how earned income affects entitlements.

In the next section, we describe supported employment, followed by a description of supported education.

Supported Employment

IPS employment supports for young adults with serious mental illness are similar to those provided to older adults. But IPS for young adults typically focuses more on education and certificate training, involvement with family and friends, and engagement and outreach practices that are acceptable to young adults.

IPS specialists carry a caseload of up to 20 clients. They focus only on employment and education as part of career advancement. In addition, IPS specialists are generalists who provide all phases of the employment process for each person on their caseload, from intake to job supports.

Upon receiving a referral, the IPS specialist meets with the client to help identify goals for employment, education, or both. Over the next several meetings, the IPS specialist gathers information about the person's interests, previous work experiences, educational background, hobbies, current activities, social network, and transferable skills to develop a career profile. Information from the career profile helps to formulate goals and objectives for successful employment, schooling or both. When the client expresses interest in employment, they formulate an individualized plan, using information from the career profile, to seek meaningful employment and arrange supports for maintaining employment.

Concurrently the IPS specialist talks with the other treatment team members (e.g., psychiatrist, therapist, care manager, peer specialist) in weekly team meetings to learn about their understanding of the client and to coordinate services. Team members, family members, and friends can provide valuable information to the career profile and for developing an employment plan.

As part of the career profile, and prior to making employer contacts, the IPS specialist discusses with the client advantages and disadvantages of disclosing information about having a disability to an employer. Some people choose to share information to an employer about their disability in order to ask for an accommodation (e.g., support from an IPS specialist, quiet work station). When a client chooses not to disclose information, the IPS specialist does not reveal any information to the employer when conducting job development that would violate the client's confidentiality and decisions about disclosure. Instead, the IPS specialist proceeds with making employer contacts and building relationships to learn about hiring practices and conveys information to the client who can contact employers independently of the IPS specialist.

The IPS specialist offers to help individuals access comprehensive work incentives planning to review benefits (e.g., disability benefits, food assistance, housing subsidies) and determine the impact of earned income on those benefits. Young adults may not have applied for benefits but have questions about their eligibility. Family members are often interested in this information. An unintended consequence for securing disability benefits is that in any given year, less than 0.5% of Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiaries leave the disability rolls and return to work. Because monthly SSI checks are below the poverty level, team members encourage clients to consider jobs and careers and avoid the path of dependence on the mental health system and disability payments, leading to a life of poverty.

Within 30 days of a client's enrollment, the IPS specialist begins making in-person contacts to local hiring managers with employment positions that are consistent with the client's interests, skills and previous experiences. The IPS specialist makes at least six in-person contacts with hiring managers per week on behalf of clients on the caseload. The goal is to develop a relationship with the hiring manager to learn about the company's hiring practices and the different jobs and responsibilities. The IPS specialist does not ask about job openings but instead learns about the business in order to determine the possible fit

for the client. Following several contacts with an employer, the IPS specialist considers offering to introduce the job seeker to the employer.

Young adults may have little or no work experience. They explore options in different ways that may include volunteer work and internships. When young adults express interest in an internship, the IPS specialist encourages clients to consider internships that are related to their career goal and interest.

When IPS clients obtain employment, they work with the IPS specialist to develop an individualized job support plan. The IPS specialist coaches the client about starting the job, work clothes, transportation, payday schedule, money management and other employee responsibilities. Members of the treatment team address other issues that are work-related, such as managing symptoms at work, communication skills with co-workers and supervisor, and cognitive difficulties. Family members and close friends may provide support and encouragement as well. The IPS specialist typically meets with clients in the first day or two after they start a new job to discuss the job and any concerns. The IPS specialist has weekly contacts and may reduce to monthly as long as the individual wants and benefits from the support. Some IPS participants want the IPS specialist to join a meeting with the employer to review work performance and discuss suggestions for improvement.

Most young adults work multiple jobs and gain valuable experience as they are developing a career path. The IPS specialist coaches them on ending jobs, learning from those experiences, starting new jobs and/or attending school to acquire knowledge and skills for preferred jobs. Often people receive supports for about a year before transitioning from the IPS caseload and receiving ongoing encouragement and support from other treatment team members.

When IPS participants miss appointments, IPS specialists and other treatment team members reach out to the client to continue engagement and reschedule appointments. Young adults may have other social priorities that distract them from their work and school plans.

Supported Employment for a Young Woman with Early Psychosis

Josephine left community college after her first year due to her illness. She told her therapist that she wanted to work before returning to school. After meeting with an IPS specialist several times, she decided to look for a job in a library. She wanted to be in a quiet environment and had always been an avid reader. She was interested in learning more about library science and library management as a possible direction for her future schooling. Experience working in a library would help her with determining next steps for education. She chose not to disclose her disability to employers and therefore applied for jobs independently. Her IPS specialist located several open positions and gave the leads to Josephine.

IPS implementation manuals that provide more comprehensive descriptions of IPS services (Swanson & Becker, 2013; Swanson, Becker, Drake, & Merrens, 2008), including a manual specifically aimed at IPS for young adults (Swanson, Becker, Bond, & Drake, 2017) are available at www.IPSworks.org. The IPS Supported Employment Fidelity Scale (IPS-25) provides a roadmap for good IPS supported employment implementation and is available along with the accompanying IPS Supported Employment Review Manual on the IPSworks web site.

Supported Education

IPS focuses on mainstream academic settings, consistent with the values and principles of evidence-based supported employment (Drake et al., 2012). IPS specialists offer support in clarifying educational goals and career advancement, identifying academic or vocational certificate training locations, completing applications, securing financial support, and accessing accommodations and other supports to complete academic requirements successfully.

Just as IPS specialists learn about the employer community for supported employment, they learn about different educational institutions and certificate training programs. The IPS specialist tours campuses and meets with guidance counselors and staff from the offices for students with disabilities and discusses procedures for requesting accommodations. Community colleges may offer vocational certificate training programs, such as home health aide and pharmacy technician, for example, and other short-term training programs, such as culinary programs and graphic design. IPS specialists help clients access other certificate programs that are related to their vocational goals.

IPS Students in High School

IPS specialists encourage young adults to complete high school or gain the equivalent certificate because level of education predicts employment and future income security. IPS specialists may contact school counselors to discuss ways to support IPS high school students. In the United States, high school students with a disability that affects their ability to learn may be eligible for an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Special education teachers, the family, and the student develop a plan that includes academic and functional goals and objectives, the student's strengths, and accommodations to help the student succeed. Students who are ineligible for IEP may request a 504 plan, which has less restrictive eligibility requirements, in order to receive accommodations and services.

Postsecondary education

IPS specialists help young adults interested in further education to determine a course of study based on information in the career profile. What is the person's employment goal and career choice and how does it relate to individual preferences, strengths, skills, and experiences? Students may change their career choices but careful consideration is important because of the financial investment and time required of schooling. IPS specialists help prospective students select a school and academic program, visit the campus, complete applications, consider financial alternatives to pay for classes, books and supplies, meet with a financial counselor and help with Federal Student Aid (FAFSA-Free Application for Federal Student Aid), and meet with a career counselor.

In determining a course of study, the IPS specialist may encourage the client to speak with someone in a job in the field of interest. Why did they choose to work in the position? What do they like most about the job? What experience and training were required in order to be hired in the position? What are the job responsibilities? What do they find most challenging about the job?

IPS specialists help students consider course selections and course load. Often students with serious mental illness want to take a full course load not realizing the demands on a full-time student. IPS specialists recommend starting with one or two courses.

Education Supports

Similar to an employment plan, the IPS specialist develops an educational plan with the client that outlines education goals and objectives and the supports needed to have success at school. Other members of the mental health team provide supports to optimize learning. For example, the medication provider may adjust medications according to the individual's school functioning. Other practitioners may address communication and social skills, substance use, diet, and exercise. Family members are coached to provide encouragement and support without high expectations that may frustrate the client.

Support from an IPS specialist plays an important role for students with serious mental illness (Corrigan, 2018). IPS specialists help to navigate the academic process and provide general support and encouragement through periods of isolation, frustration and feeling overwhelmed that can occur while going to school (Corrigan, 2018). The team helps to identify stressors, coping strategies, and accommodations for a successful school experience. Documentation of the disability is required to receive an accommodation. Examples of accommodations include having a note taker, sitting toward the front of the class to minimize distractions, and extra time for test-taking. The IEP for high school students that lists accommodations and services to help the student succeed may carry over to postsecondary education.

The IPS specialist helps with study habits and may recommend using a calendar to keep track of assignment due dates and test dates. The IPS specialist keeps a copy of the dates and reminds the student of upcoming deadlines. Maintaining concentration to complete homework is sometimes difficult. The IPS specialist suggests different study routines, such as taking frequent breaks, summarizing concepts learned in short sections, studying in a quiet location (e.g., school library), and scheduling regular study time.

Supported Education for a Young Adult with Serious Mental Illness

Pat is 25 years old and lives with symptoms of schizophrenia. Pat's dream job is to be a website designer. Pat's mother met with Pat and the IPS specialist to discuss concerns she had from Pat's experience starting college a couple of years ago. The IPS specialist explained her role to support Pat and they discussed how Pat's family could provide support. The IPS specialist and Pat met with a school advisor at the local community college. They learned about a certificate program for a website designer that can be completed fully online with 27 credits. The advisor suggested the order for taking the classes. Pat started the first course and met with the IPS specialist weekly to talk about his progress.

Many young adults change their minds about whether they want to work or go to school. And some choose to do both. IPS specialists remain flexible with changing plans and help young adults with what is currently important to them.

Engaging Young Adults about Work and School

Agencies that implement IPS services make sure that all practitioners encourage people to think about work, school, and careers. Some young adults are fearful about trying a new job or going to school and others have confidence to take the steps though may benefit from basic information about the world of work and going back to school. The IPS specialist assesses the person's level of interest and builds rapport. IPS specialists ask participants how often they want to meet, where they want to meet, what they want to focus on when meeting. Young adults like to feel empowered to make decisions about their lives. What are the steps that the individual wants to take in pursuit of a job or going to school? While IPS specialists focus on work and/or school, they also engage young adults by discussing what is important to them now. IPS specialists ask how they spend their time and what they enjoy. They always return to employment and education as the focus of their meetings.

IPS specialists know that young adults are more easily contacted through newer modes of communication. They often respond quickly with texts, instant messaging, and (sometimes) emails rather than by phone. IPS supervisors provide information to IPS specialists regarding their agency's policies regarding use of cell phones.

IPS supervisors coach IPS specialists about having good boundaries when providing IPS services. Sometimes young adults begin to view their IPS specialists as friends, particularly when they are close in age to their specialists and have meetings in community settings away from the mental health agency. IPS specialists dress professionally and remind clients that their relationship focuses on the goals of work and/or school.

Including Family Support for Employment and Education

IPS specialists encourage participants to invite family members to their meetings. Young adults may live with family members and be supported by family members who are concerned about their recovery through work and education. When discussing family, the IPS specialist helps the client to broadly define family to include a good friend or other supporters. For example, who would you tell if you were hired for your dream job or you received the highest grade in your class?

Family members have knowledge about a person's strengths, coping strategies, skills, interests and past experiences that may help to identify a good job match or career direction. Families want to be helpful and support their family member in their recovery but also need information about the plan and provide input. With good information a family member may understand why it is better for their family member to gain employment with IPS support rather than apply for Social Security benefits. Families also have resources that can be helpful, such as transportation, providing employer contacts in job searching, helping with wage reporting, knowing the warning signs of illness exacerbation, helping to solve problems.

Many family members want to be involved and benefit from guidance by the IPS specialist. They may have high expectations for their family member and want them to achieve success faster than what is realistic. At the same time, IPS specialists learn about the family's culture in terms of beliefs about mental illness, socio-economic status and work, and education attainment. The IPS specialists educate families about how young adults often try several jobs before settling into a job long term. The IPS specialists also explain that it is helpful for young people to start with one or two courses in school rather than a full course load. And once they build their confidence, study skills and school routines, students may want to increase their course load and have more success. IPS specialists also explain that young adults change their minds frequently about their plans. IPS specialists continue to engage clients and explore options for meaningful work and academic pursuits during these periods of uncertainty and encourage family members to be supportive.

The manual entitled, *The IPS Supported Employment Approach to Help Young People with Work and School: A Practitioner's Guide* (Swanson, Becker, Bond, & Drake, 2017) is a resource with more information about IPS services for young adults with serious mental illness. Information about the manual is available at www.IPSworks.org.

Assuring Program Quality

IPS supervisors track the IPS team's integrated competitive employment outcomes and education milestones. The team sets goals to improve outcomes and program performance. The IPS supervisor also meets with each IPS specialist to review individual outcomes and service performance. Just as IPS supervisors provide field mentoring for job development, they also provide field mentoring for connecting with school counselors and staff.

The IPS Supported Employment Fidelity Scale (IPS-25) is used to monitor program implementation. The scale is composed of 25 criteria that are measured on a five-point scale of objective standards. Fidelity scales provide a roadmap for good implementation and reveal program changes over time. The IPS-25 has been validated, demonstrating that a higher score correlates with better employment outcomes. IPS fidelity reviews are conducted by experienced independent reviewers (e.g., IPS trainers, IPS state fidelity monitors, agency quality assurance staff). Fidelity reviewers provide recommendations to improve program performance. The baseline IPS fidelity review typically occurs six to nine months after program start and every six months until the program scores good fidelity (i.e., 100), and thereafter yearly reviews.

Several supported education scales have been developed, but none has been systematically studied or widely adopted. All of the scales have been modeled after either the original 15-item IPS Supported Employment Fidelity Scale or the current IPS-25. Future research is needed to develop and validate a combined IPS employment and education fidelity scale that is manageable in terms of length and usability.

Conclusion

Young adults with serious mental illness are interested in fulfilling their vocational aspirations, minimizing disability, and living like others in their communities. Through integrated mental health and rehabilitation services, they learn how to manage their psychiatric illness and move forward in their recovery. Further education and vocational technical training increase skills and knowledge to develop a career path. IPS specialists help with individualized job searches and career advancement.

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