

# Employment for Individuals with a Mental Health Diagnosis

*Guiding our thinking in how to shift from a medical model of treatment to a recovery model that includes employment as an integral part of wellness*

## VOICE: Visionary Opportunities to Increase Competitive Employment

A project sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy

### What has Indiana done to increase competitive employment for individuals with mental health diagnoses?

**Summer 2019:** The Division of Mental Health and Addiction (DMHA) and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) identified a group of stakeholders (Individuals with lived experience, service providers, advocates, and VR staff) to assist in the identification of "what is working well in Indiana to assist individuals with a mental health diagnosis to pursue employment", "What is not working well," and recommendations for improvement. The following needs were identified:

- Improved Collaboration among agencies that serve individuals with a mental health diagnosis
- Review of procedures and practices
- Increasing knowledge of Mental Health
- Increasing Knowledge of Resources
- Reducing stigma

**Fall/Winter 2019:** DMHA and VR jointly submitted a proposal, using the stakeholder input to outline objectives, to the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, which was approved. Four subject matter experts (providing 300 technical assistance and training hours) were chosen to assist Indiana with the VOICE project, led by co-project coordinators Kelsi Linville (DMHA) and Theresa Koleszar (VR). Specific project milestones were developed, and corresponding work began.

**Spring/Summer 2020:** Subject matter experts specializing in systems change impacting the employment of individuals with mental health diagnosis, guided project coordinators toward enhancing knowledge of policies and practices that support employment. Indiana worked toward building a foundation for a system's change that incorporates employment as a part of recovery. Project coordinators enhanced their knowledge of the elements necessary to implement and sustain Individual Placement and Support (IPS), an evidence-based practice to support individuals with mental health diagnosis to achieve successful employment.

Subject matter experts assisted with the creation of a series of videos, covering a range of topics to build awareness and reduce stigma. Presentations to the Family and Social Services Administration (FSSA) Office of Healthy Opportunities (OHO), addressing the Social Determinates of Health, which includes employment, and the Office of Medicaid Policy and Planning (OMPP) were delivered, and strategies for collaboration were identified.



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DMHA and VR analyzed data across both programs to obtain baseline data for employment of Hoosiers with mental health diagnosis who access these two systems. A key takeaway is that only about ¼ of individuals with mental health diagnosis served through these agencies are working. This further illustrates the need for system improvements to better support and encourage employment for individuals with mental health diagnosis.

**Fall/Winter 2020:** Work with subject matter experts continued to refine the strategic plan for the VOICE Project. Phase one of the education and awareness element of the VOICE project kicked off in October with the release of several educational videos as mentioned above, and the launch of the VOICE webpage. The creation of additional videos is underway.

An introductory IPS virtual training was presented to representatives from Indiana Community Mental Health Centers. The webinar detailed the principals of IPS, fidelity, success stories, and how collaboration between state agencies and local service providers is crucial to the success of IPS. The webinar identified the employment specialist or job coach as an integral part of the treatment team.

VOICE project coordinators furthered collaboration with OMPP through regular meetings to investigate strategies for necessary systems change and exploration of the development of joint guidance.

