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Employment and Recovery

Employment is an important life role for many people in our society. It has many personal and health benefits, including but not limited to improved finances, independence, self-esteem and confidence around other people. Work can often give meaning and purpose to life. It can be a way to prevent boredom and assist to manage symptoms of mental illness.

Finding and keeping a job can be difficult. International and Australian data shows that while between 60-70% of people with serious mental illness do in fact want to work; rates of participation in the workforce are far less.

Within Hunter New England Mental Health Services we assist consumers who want to work by promoting the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment. This model has proven to be the most effective way of helping people to achieve employment outcomes and is based on the following key principles:

- **Motivation to work is the best predictor of success.** This means that everyone should be offered support with job-seeking if they want it, regardless of their level of symptoms or illness.
- **Competitive, award wage employment** is a valid goal for everyone who chooses it. People do not need to be encouraged to take up positions in sheltered environments.
- **Individual job preferences** (as determined by the person seeking employment) guide all support services offered.
- **Rapid job search and placement** is the first step in a supported employment program. People do not need to try out volunteer work first, or work on building their work skills.

This recognises that people learn to work by doing just that – working. To achieve, this support is ongoing and not time limited. Consumers can access support with job seeking, and to manage their work demands and communication with their employer when they do find work.

- **Employment services and mental health services are integrated.** This means that employment consultants and mental health staff work together to support employment goals. Sometimes the mental health worker might be able to give some helpful advice, for example strategies to manage anxiety in the workplace.
- **Centrelink benefit counselling** also plays an important role, as many people are concerned about the impact that working or studying will have on their Centrelink payments.

Services to help the person you care for find and keep a job

Disability Employment Services (DES) are funded by the Federal Government to provide support to people with diagnosed health issues to find work and to stay in employment. If the person you care for has a diagnosed mental health issue, they can access these programs for free. They are funded to provide a high level of individualised support.

DES may provide support with:

- making work and career choices
- building a resume
- contacting employers and completing applications
- accompanying a person to job interviews (or sometimes arranging an opportunity to trial a job without having to do an interview)
- providing training and learning on the job once employment is found
- communicating with employers
- acting as an advocate

Job in Jeopardy Program

This program is available through DES for people who are employed but are at risk of losing their job as a result of issues relating to illness or disability. Job in Jeopardy program is free and can be accessed by contacting Centrelink or Disability Employment Support (DES) directly.

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Accessing Disability Employment Services (DES)

Co-location Employment Programs are now established at most Hunter New England Mental Health Services. Sites currently providing this are:

- Hunter Valley Mental Health Service
- Lake Macquarie Mental Health Service
- Newcastle Mental Health Service
- Support through Early Psychosis Service (STEPS)
- Manning Mental Health Service (Taree/Foster)
- Peel Valley Mental Health Services (Tamworth)
- Mental Health and Substance Use Service (MHSUS)
- Tablelands Mental Health Service (Armidale)

Consumers accessing services from these teams are eligible to meet with a DES employment consultant on site. Care Coordinators can make these referrals.

If the person you care for is not linked to one of the services listed above they can still access a DES. This is done through Centrelink. The first step is for the consumer to register as a job-seeker for Centrelink purposes. This can be done if they receive any income support benefit, including the Disability Support Pension. Centrelink can give advice about individual circumstances, but for most people, working will mean they are better off financially, and working part-time will mean they are still entitled to financial support.

Centrelink Employment Services can be contacted on 132 850, or you can attend a local office. For more information visit the website

<http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/information/centrelink-website>.

Centrelink may require the consumer to undergo an Employment Services Assessment (ESAt). This is to determine the level of employment support required.

To ensure that the person you care for is eligible for a DES their doctor may need to complete a supporting letter for the ESAt. This should confirm the diagnosis and enduring nature of the illness (if appropriate) and any support services required.

The consumer could also contact their local DES directly. Contact details can be found at www.jobsearch.gov.au - click on 'Find a provider' and select 'Disability Employment Services'.

What can carers, families and friends do?

Carers have an important role to play for the person who wants to seek employment. Carers may understand the needs of the person, their strengths and potential challenges that may arise in looking for and retaining work. For services supporting the consumer's goal of employment, this information can be critical in finding a good job match. With consumer consent, carers and family are encouraged to be involved in discussions and planning with the employment service so they can support the person to gain successful employment.

For further information discuss with you mental health practitioner. For regional areas contact your

Community Mental Health Rehabilitation Coordinators:

Manning Ph 02 6552 5792

Tamworth Ph 02 6767 7910

Armidale Ph 02 6767 9856

Moree Ph 02 6757 0239