

Scenario 1

Scenario: Bob has applied for services through the Employment Services Network or WIPA (Work Incentives Planning and Assistance) Program. As an adult with a learning disability and a psychiatric disability, he receives services through a local community mental health center. He insists that he is entitled to support services because he has a “record” of having a disability. Is the Employment Services Network obligated to honor Bob’s request?

Solution: No, the Employment Services Network is not obligated to provide accommodations for Bob. An individual’s insistence that he or she has a record of a disability or a parent’s/guardian’s belief that his/her adult child has a disability does not take the place of documentation.

Story: Bob wants to get a job. He is discouraged that voicing his disability is not enough to guarantee Employment Services Network services, but gets the documentation he needs to begin working with a Benefits Counselor. The Benefits Counselor explains to Bob the benefits of employment and how his Social Security Administration benefits can be effected. Bob understands that there may be changes in his monthly check if he exceeds limits set by his state. Bob chooses to pursue employment.

Bob works closely with his Benefits Counselor to determine what skills he has and what type of job would best fit his career wants and needs. Using Bob’s strengths of writing and artistic expression, he and his Benefits Counselor consider local jobs where Bob could be most successful.

Bob lives a block away from the local newspaper, they are looking for a part-time cartoonist to help illustrate local events. Bob thinks he could be successful at this job if he could receive training. His Benefits Counselor meets with the local newspaper and discusses Bob’s strengths and his potential for being successful in the position. The manager asks to meet Bob and see some of his work.

Bob has not shared much of his materials with others and is unsure how to present his work to the manager. His Benefits Counselor assists him in creating a portfolio of some of his writings and some of his drawings. Then takes him to meet the manager and see the newspaper office. The manager agrees to try Bob in the position and explains that he will need further training around newspaper business functions and the cartoonist role. Because Bob has no prior education in the newspaper business his Benefits Counselor suggests he take a course in basic journalism and media studies. Bob agrees that this will be a good idea and enrolls in an adult education course at his local technology center.

Bob feels like he is making progress. He will be able to keep his benefits, including housing, health insurance, food stamps, and travel reimbursement for medical appointments. Bob knows that his income check may change depending on the amount of money he makes working at the newspaper. He is glad that he will be making his own money and helping out in his community.

After 6 months of working at the newspaper as a cartoonist, Bob finds that he is feeling much better physically and emotionally. He has finished his adult education course and his trainings at work successfully. His family notices that he wants to join them in activities and he is attending to his daily living skills without reminders.

Question: How has employment at the newspaper affected Bob’s recovery?

Scenario 2

Scenario: Jim was looking at a Help Wanted sign, secretly wishing that it'd been posted just for him. Work had been a very satisfying part of his life before the accident and he'd often thought about returning, but wasn't sure if that was possible with his disabilities. Jim has Bipolar Disorder and the accident left him wheel chair bound, so he's been on Social Security Income for almost 10 years. Returning to work was a goal he'd had on all his treatment plans, so he'd been talking to his therapist about a desire to work for many years.

Solution: A year ago Jim decided with his therapist that he should talk to a Vocational Rehabilitation (V.R.) Counselor. He went to the local Career Center where he found the people very friendly and they assisted him in creating a generic resume and cover letter, and taught him how to look at ads in the newspapers and online. Jim thought he already knew some of this, but it was a good step towards getting a job.

Story: When he met the V.R. Counselor she discussed with him the different ways that he could work part-time and not lose his Social Security benefits. Jim became very anxious, he hadn't thought about what working would do to the current benefits he receives, and he really wanted to work full-time. He remembered how good it felt to take care of himself and have some extra money for things he enjoyed. Extra money came rarely for Jim on his fixed income, but he had everything he needed to get by.

As Jim talked more with the V.R. Counselor, he become more and more relaxed; she told him about the Ticket to Work and other plans that the government uses to assist people in transitioning from SSI and SSDI to employment. He felt better knowing that there were ways to help him be successful at becoming self-sufficient.

Jim went with the V.R. Counselor to the Social Security Office and picked up materials about Working while Disabled, Ticket to Work and How Work Affects Benefits. He was surprised by all the information that was readily available to him and was pleased to learn that others in similar situations to his go back to work every day. He went home with the materials, anxious and excited that he was on his way to getting back to work. As he read the materials, Jim calculated how many hours he could work to keep his benefits if he chose part-time work and how long he could work full-time before he'd lose his benefits altogether and be considered as having earned Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA), (able to support himself financially).

Jim was able to determine that the best option for him to return to work and be able to be self-sufficient would be to utilize the long-term supports program to continue his education. If Jim could gain experience and knowledge then he would be able to get a job with a salary that would be competitive to his current Social Security Benefits.

Jim knows that he enjoys working on computers and has become very familiar with the program's he's installed on his trying to keep himself busy since being out of work. He signs up at hi local community college for a 4 year degree in computer technology and begins researching options for careers. Jim feels motivated to be successful. He contacts a friend and shares his decision, and finds he is proud of himself for taking an initiative in furthering his life.

Jim knows that he won't be able to go back to work immediately, but talks to the local computer store about his plans and requests to volunteer. They are pleased at his willingness to help and find him a job organizing computer parts. Jim believes this is a great start because he will be helping out and gaining knowledge about the parts that make up the computers. His disabilities will not be a barrier in doing this job and the store owner respects his abilities. Jim thinks that with time he may be able to use the skills he learns volunteering and at the college to get a job where he can use a Ticket to Work to start the process towards earning Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) and be able to leave the SSDI program.

Question: How does Jim approach employment in his recovery?

Scenario 3

Scenario: Becky wanted to be a part of her new community. She was happy that the agency she got her housing voucher from had listened to her and she was within walking distance of downtown. Becky was familiar with the bus system and wanted to find out the local routes in case weather made it so she could not walk about. She was pleased to learn that a bus stopped two houses down from her, so she would not need to worry about transportation.

She had talked to her brother several times over the past 6 months about getting a job. Her brother was happy to help her where he could, but he was not sure that they would find an employer that was open to working with a person with multiple disabilities. Becky, diagnosed with Paranoid Schizophrenia, also had two learning disabilities that greatly limited her ability to manage and attend to money and numbers.

Solution: As her guardian, her brother needed to agree to her getting a job. Becky talked him into taking her to the Social Security Office to see if she could work and keep her benefits. When her brother agreed that Becky could look for a part-time job, she was very excited. She put in applications where she saw help wanted signs and talked to the career office about what to say about her disabilities. Becky was happy to learn that there was a job coach who worked in her area and set up an appointment for her and her brother. She was happy to find out that two of the places she had applied at were regular connections for the job coach and this could be helpful.

Story: Becky got a call from the bookstore at the local university. The job was to match the incoming textbooks and materials to the course and she was very excited about the opportunity to interview. This job, she had looked forward to because she was thinking about starting school next year, if she could prove to her brother that she could be successful at a part-time job. She called the job coach and told her that she had an interview. They discussed what they thought would be the best approach considering her concerns about her disabilities.

Becky interviewed the following day and was pleased with her experience. She decided to be open with her interviewer about her limitations and concerns if they asked her to sell the store's merchandise. The store manager thanked Becky for her honesty and told her that she did not need to worry; she did not think her disabilities would interfere with the job and asked her if she would be able to start the next week.

Becky excitedly called her brother to tell him her good news. The university was two blocks from her home, so there would only be occasional costs for bus travel during poor weather and she would bring her own lunch from home so not to cost her for food expenses.

Becky was happy to help in her community. She adapted to the environment and enjoyed meeting and interacting with the students, educators, and community members that came to the book store. Her brother began telling her she seemed happier and was pleased to hear that she had made some friends. Being a part of her community made Becky feel needed and appreciated and was building her self-confidence and self-respect. She was feeling better and experiencing fewer symptoms of her diagnoses.

Question: How did Becky change/grow based on employment in her recovery?

Scenario 4

Scenario: Lydia wanted to do more with her life than continue trips in and out of the hospital for mental health services as her service providers had predicted for her future. As an adult with a severe and persistent mental illness, she received services through local community mental health providers. Her insistence that she wanted more out of life was not respected by her providers as she shared her life goals.

Solution: Lydia's insistence to her providers that she could reach her life goals, created opportunities for her to become involved in activities beyond hospital care and mental health services.

Story: Lydia began volunteering at the Together Place, the Bangor Quality Improvement Council and at Advocacy Initiative Network of Maine (AIN). Other consumer contacts helped her get connected to these groups and meetings. By attending these volunteer consumer activities, Lydia was able to gain skills for employment. She made connections that allowed her to continue to grow and benefit from being involved.

Over time, Lydia was able to utilize learned skills and experiences to participate fully in trainings. Her determination to complete each task increased her sense of self and boosted her self-esteem. Lydia was denied employment opportunities because others felt she was too ill to perform necessary tasks on a regular basis. She continued to invest herself in her volunteer opportunities and was able to prove her ability to perform.

Lydia began working part-time, 10 hours a week to start and slowly increased hours. As she gained confidence, Lydia was able to work more and more hours. Today, Lydia works 30 hours a week as AIN's Administrative Assistant and Leadership Academy Coordinator. She has worked continually on many projects for AIN and continues to support community programs for adults with mental illness through volunteering at the Together Place Social Club and is president of Maine Mental Health Connections Board of Directors.

Lydia's involvement and recovery story inspires others to reach beyond their current circumstances. She is supportive of AIN members and helps to create AIN trainings and educational opportunities for the membership. Lydia provides a great wealth of information and keeps current information flowing to staff and members through our website, and action alerts.

Over the course of less than 10 years, Lydia has been able to move from disability income to regular employment and self-sustaining income. She has opted to use the Medicare buy-in program to keep her medical insurance and has reached many of her personal life goals including marriage and owning her own home.

Question: How did Lydia's determination lead to employment and recovery?

Scenario 5

Scenario: A psychiatrist told Monica more than 10 years ago, that she could not work and that continuing college was an unreachable goal as she “is too sick, and should go on disability”. Monica wanted to return to college and work full-time. She was denied disability and deemed eligible to work, though could not find a job accepting of her mental health challenges and needed time off for therapy and medication appointments. She had struggled to make ends meet with part-time, per diem and short-term job opportunities without health insurance and needed help covering medical and mental health expenses. As a non-categorical (childless adult), Monica did not meet the criteria to receive help from Maine’s MaineCare health insurance program and needed to again go on a waiting list for when the state re-opened general enrollments.

Solution: Monica struggled with treatments through her local medical clinic where they accepted sliding scale fees, taking lower doses of psychiatric medications and alternative medications. As the Personal Care Physician (PCP) didn’t feel comfortable prescribing anti-depressants and anti-psychotics as they were out of his medical training (respectfully). Through these struggles Monica used coping skills shared by peers (other mental health consumers) to get by enough to continue attending college, volunteering and occasional work.

Story: Through supporters, Monica was able to meet many more peers and be connected to organizations and groups where others shared similar experiences. Learning that Monica was not alone in the struggles of being a non-categorical, she became motivated to help others, while helping her-self.

Monica soon after graduating from college with a Bachelor’s Degree quickly learned that this did not change her struggles with Employment. Having taken 7 years to earn a 4 year degree, she realized it widened the job opportunities that she could apply for, but she was still faced with the difficulties of finding a career work place. She knew she’d require health insurance to meet the financial demands of medical and mental health care as well as an employer who understood and accepted a need for sick as well as mental health days. Finding that living in a rural state such work places were few and far between, Monica needed to build better coping skills to meet the demands of the work force.

Coping skills for employment begin with self-care. For Monica learning to accept personal challenges was an early step in fitting into the job market. She went to the local career center and asked for assistance with refining her cover letter, resume and interviewing skills to better meet the employer expectations. Learning these skills is not easy. Monica practiced regularly and still made little progress on achieving confident interviewing skills. Barriers like interviewing were an eye opening experience that showed her that she’d need to find alternative ways to show her abilities to work effectively.

Monica continued to show her abilities through attending meetings, leading group activities, and applying to be part of community boards and events. With each opportunity Monica was able to gain more confidence and learn skills to achieve goals she set for herself. These small steps she considers the foundation for her future. Having been moved from a volunteer board member position, to part-time temporary staff, to full-time employment, Monica continues to show growth and progress.

Today, as an adult with co-occurring disorders, a severe and persistent mental illness, a trauma survivor, and a recovering alcoholic, Monica is the Network Representative for the Advocacy Initiative Network of Maine. She is also the Chair of Maine’s Statewide Quality Improvement Council, Maine COSII (Co-Occurring State Integration Initiative) Champion of Integrated Care, CIPSS (Certified Intentional Peer Support Specialist) and a Graduate student at SNHU (Southern New Hampshire University). She is defying the odds against her, while inspiring and restoring hope to peers.

Question: How did Monica use her struggles and experiences to motivate her recovery towards gainful employment and further education?