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END Homelessness

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Working to End

Homelessness Series

Service Delivery Frinciples and

Techniques: Helping people experiencing homelessness engage in services and succeed in employment

services, employment and other life changes at different times and in different ways. Understanding how to meet people where they are and help foster the process of change can bolster program successes with people experiencing homelessness.

With this in mind, employment programs should consider supporting transitions to employment by applying program principles and techniques that foster positive change, meet individual needs and interests, and help participants acclimate to the norms and practices of the workplace. Drawing from the success of homeless system providers, workforce programs may apply the following:

Individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness are motivated to engage in

- understand and <u>facilitate the process of change</u>,
- offer <u>employment program options</u> that meet individual's aptitudes, interests, and readiness to change,
- deliver services that take into account participants' <u>experiences with</u> trauma, and
- focus the organization, services, and program staff on <u>prioritizing</u> employment and reinforcing a culture of work.

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Transitional Jobs Network

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The National Transitional Jobs Network (NTJN) launched the Working to End Homelessness Initiative (WEH) in 2011, with support from the Butler Family Fund, to shine a spotlight on the important role of employment solutions in addressing homelessness and to identify and disseminate promising employment practices. To achieve these ends, the NTJN conducted a review of literature, met with key stakeholders and experts, and convened a national community of practice focused on employment programming for people experiencing homelessness. The community of practice includes 22 experienced workforce development professionals in 16 states that operate a diverse set of employment models including transitional jobs, supported employment, social enterprise, work readiness training, and alternative staffing and serve a diversity of populations experiencing homelessness. Throughout the course of a year professionals have identified best practices, lifted up employment solutions to serving the population, and highlighted policy and systems challenges to their work.



1. Facilitate the Process of Change

Helping participants identify their purpose for change and build confidence to take the steps necessary for change is a core element of success for homeless service and employment programming. Some individuals experiencing homelessness have been unemployed or underemployed for a long time, may lack basic education and work readiness skills, or may face other challenges such a substance use or severe mental illness which can make it challenging to attain and maintain employment. Taking steps from unemployment to employment may be hindered by these and by low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, alienation, and feeling overwhelmed. Programs can help individuals overcome these attitudinal, perceptual, and behavioral barriers by understanding the process of change and modifying program elements to reflect how change happens.



Adapted from Norcross, Krebs, & Prochaska (2010)

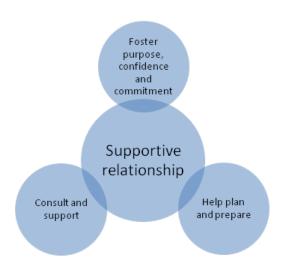
A significant body of research evidence lends credibility to applied models of behavioral change such as the stages of change. In this model, an individual moves through the five stages: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. Through each of these stages, individuals move from being unaware or less aware of the need to change to considering change, deciding to change, preparing to change, making changes, and then maintaining positive

Further Resources

- The Stages of Change
- Enhancing Motivation to Change
- HUD Lecture on Change

change beyond six months. "Recycling" to past stages is an accepted part of the process as well.⁴ Engaging with processes of change is integral to helping many individuals experiencing homelessness manage barriers and achieve employment.⁵

To design an employment program that supports change toward the goal of employment, providers should train program staff to recognize where participants are in the stages of change and respond accordingly. As a participant moves through precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance, staff should take on roles akin to a supportive friend, listener, questioning teacher, guidance counselor, and finally consultant. In taking on these roles and supporting the transition to employment for participants, program staff can apply the following practices:



- <u>Develop a supportive relationship</u> A program staff member begins fostering the change process with a participant by developing supportive trusting relationships. This relationship is core to maintaining engagement and supports all other processes of change.
- <u>Foster purpose, confidence and commitment to change</u> The staff member may use techniques such as motivational interviewing to assess participants' strengths, barriers, goals, and confidence to change, learn what is holding them back, encourage change, inform them of options, elicit their feedback, and progress to action if they express commitment to a next step.
- <u>Help plan and prepare</u> When participants are ready, the staff member should work with
 them to explore employment options, develop a flexible employment plan, and begin taking
 steps to change. These may include entering a temporary work position, employment in the
 competitive labor market, or undergoing any necessary preparations such as training and
 credentialing to meet the requirements of the participant's chosen employer or field.
- <u>Consult and support</u> Once the participant has entered employment, staff members may
 use techniques such as motivational interviewing to provide ongoing job coaching, planning,
 and wrap-around case management to help participants work through barriers that arise on
 the job, further employment goals, and access any additional services needed to maintain
 progress.

Although there is a progression implied in these processes, participants may be at any point in the process when they enter the program and may "recycle" to earlier stages as new challenges arise. Staff may need to revisit different roles throughout the process and should therefore offer these supports flexibly for as long as the participant needs them.⁷ The following sections discuss these ideas in more depth and align them with the stages of change model.

Foster Supportive Staff-Participant Relationships

Individuals in the **precontemplation stage** are not ready to change and may be less aware of the issues that get in the way of employment or of the value of employment. For example, participants may not realize that they can achieve life goals through earned income, that they have the ability to work, or that they may need to work through perceptions, attitudes and

"... Building that relationship and gaining the trust of the people, hearing their story, and walking through life with them has been the best practice for us."

-Carlton Willis at Mission Waco, Texas

behaviors to get and keep a job. Helping participants identify their purpose for change and build confidence to engage in employment services and to address barriers to employment is crucial at this stage and beyond.⁸

Motivation can be fostered through supportive, trusting relationships between program staff and participants. Supportive staff-participant relationships have strong effects on outcomes in therapy, and providers affirm that this holds true for supportive relationships between jobseekers and employment program staff such as case managers, job coaches, job developers and retention specialists. The supportive relationship is considered integral to engaging participants and the core of all other activities that foster change. The supportive relationship fosters trust and understanding with the participant and gives the staff member a chance to learn more about the participant, assess their engagement with employment, and determine their readiness for change.

Here a staff member takes on the role of a supportive friend, listening to participants' life stories, and opening conversations about the participant's goals and dreams. Developing such a relationship requires humility, empathy, flexibility, patience, and clear personal boundaries on the part of staff members. Staff can respectfully engage participants or prospective participants in 'hanging out,' non-judgmental listening, and casual conversation to help individuals feel comfortable. During these interactions staff should use empathic communication to demonstrate understanding and affirmation. This includes comforting body language, open-ended person-centered questions, and addressing goals for change with patience and respect.

Use Motivational Interviewing

As the relationship between the staff member and participant grows and trust is established, the staff member may begin approaching goals for change – be that making employment a goal or addressing barriers to employment.¹³ Participants are more likely to take steps to change when they believe that change is necessary, possible, and positive.¹⁴ In the motivational interviewing model trained staff members

Further Resources

- Overview of Motivational Interviewing
- Tips on Motivational Interviewing
- MI Video Training & Other Multimedia

take a non-directive guiding style to help participants identify their own purpose for change, understand that they have the ability to make change happen, and commit to action when they are ready. Research shows that motivational interviewing is a powerful strengths-based practice in helping participants identify their purpose for change and build confidence to change through a supportive relationship. 16

Foster Purpose and Confidence to Change

Staff members begin fostering motivation in the context of a supportive relationship, asking questions about the participant's goals. As staff members continue to learn about the participant's goals for the future, staff can ask questions about why participants may need or want to enter employment and why they may need to address barriers, listen closely to assess confidence and commitment, and inform participants about their strengths and program options. This process may continue for multiple rounds during a session and is applicable to new

choices and challenges throughout the stages of change.¹⁷ Specifically, staff members should:¹⁸

- Express empathy Begin by taking an empathic approach, encourage participants to express their views and goals, and listen to assess barriers, readiness for change, motivation, and strengths.
- "... Participants are often in crisis at the beginning. I can't blow their minds too much, but I need to blow their minds on their value and what they really can achieve."

 -Nina Lindsey at St. Joseph the Worker, Arizona
- Acknowledge self-efficacy Help participants see that change is possible and self-driven by framing their strengths and experience as evidence of their ability.
- Accept resistance Avoid confronting participants about any resistance directly.
- Support recognition of the need for change Help participants recognize where change is
 necessary and positive by questioning current attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors that
 hinder them from reaching their stated goals.

Foster Commitment to Change

When participants realize the value and possibility of employment and what employment and other resources are available to meet their goals they have reached the **contemplation stage**. Here they are considering taking steps to achieve employment, but have not yet made a commitment and may still feel uncomfortable with change.¹⁹ Participants may hold unspoken reservations about engaging in employment activities and they are more likely to take steps for change and maintain progress when they have expressed commitment to concrete action at the end of each meeting with a staff member.²⁰ Staff can support progress by transitioning to conversations around commitment to specific goals and plans. This holds true throughout the stages of change as the staff member and participants work to develop a concrete plan, address and work through barriers on the job.²¹ To foster commitment staff members can:²²

- capitalize on motivation by asking participants how they might change and listen to determine what is hindering them from taking steps to change;
- inform the participant about program options and suggest possible steps for action; and
- ask for participant feedback about these options, listen for words of commitment, and collaborate to determine concrete next steps that they are ready to commitment to.

Help Prepare a Flexible Employment Plan

In the **preparation stage**, individuals have committed to steps for change, are beginning to make changes, and intend to take serious action for employment but have not yet done so.²³ Developing immediate realistic goals is important at this stage and should draw on participant strengths and existing resources to help further participant hope that change is possible.²⁴ Here programs such as <u>Goodwill Industries of Houston</u> help participants develop an <u>individual employment plan</u> with immediate realistic goals and steps to manage personal barriers and <u>build the core competencies</u> needed for employment. Wisdom from the field of workforce development suggests that participants are best supported when an individualized employment plan:²⁵

- takes account for individual needs, barriers, and strengths,
- charts specific manageable and measurable actions, and
- keeps everyone accountable through real deadlines for each step.

Keep the Plan Flexible

The stages of change model further suggests that participants continually learn as they work to achieve their goals and that this consideration must be continually integrated into the employment plan. Participants may benefit from flexible plans that allow them to incorporate ongoing lessons learned into the plan as they develop new goals, experience new barriers, and realize new strengths.²⁶ Here staff members can continually assess new barriers, strengths, and goals as they arise and adapt program strategies and endpoints as needed.²⁷

Pay Attention to Signs of Commitment

Participants should not be moved to an employment plan when they have not yet indicated they are ready as this will most likely yield short-term change only.²⁸ Participants who are not ready for the action stage may be better engaged in low-demand activities such as exploring the idea of work or entering exploratory positions that they are interested in.²⁹ Commitment at the end of a meeting is the strongest predictor of acting on a goal or plan in motivational interviewing and staff members can watch for strong words of commitment before settling on each step in the plan.³⁰ Here staff members may continue motivational interviewing techniques at each point of action to determine if the participant is committed, learn their reasons for hesitancy, and then suggest different options until the participant responds with strong words of commitment.³¹

Help Manage Barriers

In the **action stage** individuals have taken steps to move past behavioral barriers and build the core competencies needed for employment. In the **maintenance stage**, individuals build on initial gains and continue working successfully for at least six months.³² In both of these stages job coaching by staff may be useful for helping participants identify, manage and work through barriers.

Prepare for Barrier Management

Programs can help participants develop preemptive strategies to mitigate currently known barriers on the job.³³ For example, staff may need to help the participant identify and plan to manage past attitudes about authority, explore and define fairness, plan to adapt for changing schedules, and address any issues with self-presentation. To help further these lessons, staff may equip participants with employment "starter kits" complete with helpful hints, reminders, necessary work information, and official documents.³⁴

Coach through Barriers

The workplace is an important arena for identifying and addressing barriers as they surface, learning about employment, and practicing lessons learned.³⁵ Once the participant has entered employment, staff members can draw on motivational interviewing techniques and the employment plan to help the participant continue taking steps to change as barriers emerge on

the job. Here staff members should:

- help the participant assess and reassess their goals through open conversation and questioning;³⁶
- help the participant explore the pros and cons of the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors
 that may pose barriers to employment by reminding them of their goals, asking critical
 questions about achieving goals given the behavior or perception, proposing solutions, and
 gaining feedback on commitment until a realistic action step has been agreed upon;³⁷
- draw on participants' work history and life experience to help them draw on past successes, identify latent skills, and recognize their strengths moving forward; and
- offer problem-solving guidance for overcoming potential worksite obstacles such as potentially unfamiliar workplace norms, culture, and interactions.³⁸

Understand "Recycling" as a Learning Experience

Individuals will sometimes "recycle" to earlier stages of change and resume old behaviors that are problematic in the workplace such as tardiness. As such, it is important to offer flexibility in the program and see participant mistakes or missteps as a chance to learn, reassess and move forward. These techniques should be repeated as new workplace barriers arise and support should be offered for as long as the participant needs.³⁹

2. Meet People Where They Are

Consumer choice, an important principle that acknowledges the importance of participants guiding their program experience, helps in engaging individuals experiencing homelessness in services and tailoring programs to "meet people where they are" both in the stages of change and professional development. Participants may be at different places in their readiness for employment and may benefit from a wide menu of employment services and opportunities that take account of their work readiness, skills, interests, and goals.⁴⁰ Based on this, programs are encouraged to consider the following recommendations.

Meet Participants' Work Interests

Many leading providers work to meet individual's interests and credentialing needs through a range of job placements, work experiences, and occupational skills trainings. For example, Project Hope in Boston offers a variety of sector-based trainings and job placements in the healthcare industry based on the participant's career goals and level of skill attainment, in addition to adult education tracks to help participants bridge the credentialing requirements of the sector. The Doe Fund in New York City and Philadelphia works to meet individual career interests by offering a range of sector-based work experiences, trainings, and credentialing opportunities to participants who have completed the core Transitional Jobs program. In practice, it is especially important to carefully explain employment options and discern which ones are right for the participant in question. Participants may come to a greater sense of engagement and confidence as they realize the full extent and range of work opportunities, and an attractive work opportunity may help engage participants in other services such as addiction treatment.

Help Participants Make the Work Transition at Their Own Pace

Participants may benefit from flexible positions that allow them to move at a pace that aligns with their skills, readiness for employment and motivation.⁴¹ Some participants may prefer to temporarily work part-time while participating in a training program or ease into work through programs with graduated stress and responsibility over time in settings with their preferred level of structure or autonomy.⁴² For example, Roca, Inc. in Boston, Massachusetts offers participants a progressively tiered transitional job experience, in which participants work through work crew positions of increasing expectations and responsibility and when ready are placed at jobs in the competitive labor market.

Draw on Population-Specific Strategies

Participants may also have specific needs and preferences according to their <u>life situation</u>. For example, research shows that individuals with mental illness do best when they rapidly enter employment in the competitive labor market, individuals with disabling conditions and health issues may need worksite accommodation, and suggest that some veterans may prefer to ease into civilian work by beginning in work crews structured like "squads" or "platoons." Additionally, programs serving youth may want to consider weaving leadership development and civic engagement into their employment services programs and be mindful of the need to establish critical partnerships that can support successful transitions to employment such as those with probation, parole, child support or legal services when working with individuals reentering communities from incarceration or those with a criminal record.⁴⁴

Provide Flexible and Open Access to Employment Services

Because some participants may not yet have the occupational skills necessary for specific job placements and may not yet be interested or ready for full-time work, providers use additional strategies to ensure that everyone has access to employment services. For example, Goodwill Industries of Houston in Texas offers a general employment program alongside a range of population and sector-targeted programs to ensure that no individuals fall through programmatic gaps. Chrysalis Enterprises in California offers rapid entry to temporary staffing positions for people ready to work, and Transitional Jobs "work crew" positions for individuals who may need time to explore and adjust to work with additional supports and a 'learn how to work while working' experience. Inspiration Corporation works to meet individual engagement and ability through entry to a low threshold program in the Employment Project (TEP) or a moderate threshold program in Inspiration Kitchens with on-the-job training.

Leave an Open Door to Employment

Not everyone may be interested or ready for work or a specific employment program and it is important to gauge interest in the options available and refer participants to more appropriate employment programs or services if necessary. It is especially important to leave a standing offer of employment assistance to all participants and assure them that they can work when they decide it is right for them.⁴⁵ For example, <u>St. Joseph the Worker</u> in Phoenix, Arizona encourages participants to accept services when it is right for them and offers business cards with program services and contact information.

3. Operate through Trauma-Informed Care

An important part of helping individuals experiencing homelessness make a positive change is to understand the relationship between homelessness and trauma, and inform employment program processes and strategies with trauma in mind. Research shows that many individuals, especially women, experience homelessness after physical or sexual abuse, and losing one's home or living in a shelter may itself produce psychological trauma.⁴⁶

Further Resources

- Trauma Training Resources
- Trauma-Informed Care
- Trauma and Homelessness

Individuals who have experienced trauma may have hidden psychological triggers that may pose sudden barriers to program participation and gaining employment. Signs of stress related to trauma may include being easily startled, strong irritable reactions to minimal provocation, poor sleep, nightmares and flashbacks, and detached behavior. Trauma-informed care is a service delivery principle focused on tailoring services and staff behavior to the needs of trauma survivors. To ensure that individuals are not further traumatized, providers are encouraged to approach all services with trauma in mind and avoid practices that may induce or facilitate further trauma. Trauma-informed service delivery includes the following:⁴⁷

- understand traumatic stress and recognize that participant behaviors are an adaptation to past traumatic experiences;
- recognize that there is not something 'wrong' with the participant;
- establish a safe environment by ensuring basic needs, safety measures, and staff behavior that is consistent, predictable, and respectful;
- respect how cultural context influences perceptions, foster opportunities for cultural rituals, and understand cultural symbols such as military acronyms for veterans;
- maintain awareness of human rights, help participants regain a sense of control and rebuild their sense of autonomy, keep them informed about the program, outline expectations, and allow them to make decisions;
- understand that healing happens in safe, authentic, positive relationships; and
- understand that recovery is possible and instill hope through peer support.

St. Patrick Center in St. Louis, Missouri establishes a safe environment for participants by performing intake in a pleasing office setting rather than cubicles and by training all staff to identify signs of trauma, engage participants with trauma in mind, and link to trauma related services. Women who have survived trauma are served through the promising Trauma Recovery Empowerment Model (TREM), where participants attend 33 75-minute group meetings with a focus on peer support, empowerment, cognitive restructuring, and psycho-education.⁴⁸

4. "Vocationalize" the Service Organization

A promising approach to ensuring quality employment programming for individuals experiencing homelessness is to "vocationalize" housing and supportive service programs, integrating elements of workforce development into the program by designing organizational priorities and practices to acknowledge the importance of work, emphasize employment as a goal, and emulate workplace norms in the program.⁴⁹

Make Work an Organizational Priority

Individuals experiencing homelessness should be engaged with employment as soon as they express interest and have satisfied basic needs such as food, shelter, and clothing. Experts emphasize the need to offer employment as early as possible and ensure that all service goals ultimately aim to help participants achieve employment and self-sufficiency. All staff should be brought in as members of a service team that reinforces the importance of work and fosters an atmosphere of high expectations and hope. All services should be seen as a chance to engage participants in discussions about employment, the participants'

Program Example - Building Changes

Building Changes in Washington State redefines the role of the homeless service provider to supporting participation in the workforce system; embeds the expectations, practices, and service delivery of employment in all aspects of homeless services; and establishes a culture that recognizes the ability of participants to attain employment and sets high expectations.

Click here to learn more about Building Changes.

strengths, and their goals. To make work a priority in a service organization that offers housing or supportive services, an on-site champion can advocate for cross-training among staff and hold open dialogues on the importance of employment services.⁵⁰

Model Workplace Norms and Processes

Beyond fostering lessons about employment in a classroom, through coaching, or on the job, providers can model work in how they deliver services. For example, some workforce programs use program application processes similar to job applications, incorporate drug testing which can also serve as a means of identifying potential barriers and need for additional services, job interviewing or mock interviewing for transitional employment positions, the use of online or computer-based time-cards and clearly articulated reasons why an individual could be dismissed from the program for not meeting expectations or agreements, similar to being let go from a job. These practices have the value of offering exposure to real employment processes in order to help participants who are in the **preparation**, **action and maintenance stages** prepare for employment in the competitive labor market.⁵¹

For individuals with significant gaps in work history these and other practices may be critical to acclimating individuals to current, real-world work practices and expectations. Job search and employment experiences should also be realistic yet flexible, with regular and constructive feedback on participant performance and include an assurance that a firing or program exit

does not jeopardize well-being. When programs expose participants to regular employment requirements and workplace expectations, it is critical that jobseekers are given feedback on their performance, are offered <u>multiple chances to make mistakes</u>, reapply or reenter the program, and are referred to other programs that might be a better fit if necessary.⁵²

For example, <u>Cleanslate</u> at the Cara Program in Chicago, Illinois helps motivated participants learn and practice real employer norms and work readiness skills in a transitional job with daily evaluations and feedback from staff, in addition to peer support and structured group events to help them maintain motivation throughout the program. Alternatively, <u>Inspiration Corporation</u> in Chicago, Illinois connects participants with the services they need including a low threshold and a moderate threshold program. Staff members work with participants to determine roadblocks to participation in the program, and coach them to take action steps for employment. By modeling workplace norms and processes in the program, modified with multiple chances to reapply and referral access to exploratory options and other services, participants can practice and learn workplace norms and incorporate them into concrete action steps for change.

Conclusion

For individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness, as well as for many other populations with significant barriers to employment, finding and keeping employment often requires moving through a personal change or transition that can be unfamiliar and challenging. Service providers and policymakers should consider how to meet people where they are and facilitate the process of change in designing programs and writing plans to end homelessness. Facilitating the process of change, offering employment options that meet participants' level of engagement and skills, being sensitive to trauma, and fostering a culture of work can be critical to supporting successful engagement in employment services and transition to employment.

For more information please contact the <u>National Transitional Jobs Network</u>. Our other briefs in the <u>Working to End Homelessness: Best Practice Series</u> include:

- <u>Populations Experiencing Homelessness</u>: Diverse barriers to employment and how to address them
- <u>Employment Program Components</u>: Considerations for designing programming for people experiencing homelessness
- <u>Employment Program Models for People Experiencing Homelessness</u>: Different approaches to program structure

The National Transitional Jobs Network (NTJN) is a coalition of city, state, and federal policy makers; community workforce organizations; anti-poverty nonprofit service providers and advocacy organizations committed to advancing and strengthening Transitional Jobs programs around the country so that people with barriers to employment can gain success in the workplace and improve their economic lives and the economic conditions of their communities. The NTJN supports a constituency of over 5,000 active members and stakeholders across the country.

The NTJN is a project of Heartland Alliance for Human Needs & Human Rights.

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