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**SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT**

*Offering Support and Opportunity for Employment Success  
for those with Mental Illness*

**Montgomery Ala.**– [Individual Placement and Support \(IPS\)](#) is a national model of supported employment for people with serious mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia spectrum disorder, bipolar, depression). [The Alabama Department of Mental Health \(ADMH\)](#) is proud to offer support to three sites across the state who facilitate this crucial program, so individuals may experience the benefits of employment and sustaining personal success.

IPS is an integral part of the [Workforce Development pillar](#) found in the ADMH’s planning efforts. “Hosting programs like Individual Placement and Support of Employment is just one way that the Alabama Department of Mental Health is helping to put Alabamians back to work, furthering their mental and emotional recovery and personal success,” said Commissioner Lynn Beshear.

Nationwide, on average, 70% of clients say they want to work, but only 15% are currently working. IPS offers an opportunity for support to find and maintain employment. IPS-supported employment helps people living with behavioral health conditions work at regular jobs of their choosing. Although variations of supported employment exist, IPS refers to an evidence-based practice of supported employment. The program increases self-esteem, reduces psychiatric symptoms and substance use, and increases self-confidence, a sense of hope and energy.

“Employment programs allow for us to truly offer meaningful day options for recipients of community mental health services,” said Kim Hammack, ADMH Director of Mental Illness Community Programs.

***Supported Employment Client Testimonial***

*“When our Employment Specialist was first introduced to the client, “John,” he did not make eye contact nor did he speak above a mumble. Since he has been working with IPS, he has obtained a job working 25 hours a week. He has taken initiative to get himself up and ready on time. His personal hygiene and daily living skills have greatly improved.”*

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*“He has made friends with co-workers and opened up tremendously. Now when he speaks he has such confidence that the team did not see in him before. He makes eye contact, smiles, shakes hands, and talks to more people now. John’s outlook on life and excitement for the future has greatly improved since he went to work. Now he is working on moving out of a group home and into his own apartment to begin living more independently.”*

“Time and time again, the success stories for those we serve provide testimony for the transformative power employment has on the lives of people. Work is recovery!” said Jessica Hales, ADMH Coordinator of Adult Mental Illness Services.

The Alabama Department of Mental Health, in collaboration with Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) and Auburn University, pursued grant funding for the purposes of bringing evidence-based supported employment services to Alabama’s public mental health services system. In April of 2014, the Alabama Department of Mental Health was awarded the *Transforming Lives through Supported Employment* grant from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA).

The five-year grant supports a budget of \$800,000 per year. These funds were utilized to establish IPS programs at two initial pilot sites, [AltaPointe Health Services, Inc.](#), located in Mobile and [Chilton-Shelby Mental Health Center](#) located in Chilton and Shelby Counties. By the fourth year, project successes led to expansion of program capacity at pilot sites and the establishment of a new site at the [Montgomery Area Mental Health Authority](#). The IPS team configuration is made up of three Employment Specialists, one Benefits Specialist, and one full-time, or two part-time, Peer Specialists. The team provides intensive services to assist individuals with a lived experience of mental illness to obtain competitive employment. From the IPS inception through September 30, 2018, the original two pilot sites have reported 227 job starts for which 173 (76%) were held continuously for at least 30 days.

### ***Supported Employment Client Testimonial***

*“Our Employment Specialist first met client “Mary” in February of 2016. Her primary diagnoses are bipolar and substance abuse disorder. She had worked with the IPS Program in 2016 and got a job at Dunkin Donuts while taking a break from attending college at Jefferson State Community College. Mary was successful with IPS in 2017, but since then she quit her job and began taking classes again at Jefferson State and again needed a part-time job that would sustain her financially through college.*

*Mary reentered the IPS Program and began working with an Employment Specialist again, which helped her obtain a job at a Shell Gas Station near her home, while our Employment Specialist and client continued to search for a job that met her needs and desires.*

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*When a job became available as a Peer Support Specialist at Chilton Shelby MHC, the Employment Specialist knew it was a perfect fit for Mary. Upon meeting with her and explaining the function of a peer support position, she was very excited to apply. She knew that her life experiences and insight to mental illness and substance abuse could help people.*

*Mary is currently attending the University of Montevallo and working as a Peer Support Specialist at Chilton Shelby MHC. She loves her job. The team can really see a change in her demeanor and overall outlook on the future. While her diagnosis has not changed, the view of herself has. She now uses her past experiences to assist others going through similar issues that she has faced in the past and gaining hands on experience in her chosen profession.*

“Work is as essential to recovery as medication, therapy, and other forms of treatment,” said Mike Autrey, ADMH Director of Peer Programs. The ADMH Office of MI Community Programs fully embraces the philosophy that employment is recovery with a desire to expand IPS-SE statewide throughout the MH services system. Funding for expansion and sustainability is a major barrier, but one for which ADMH is committed to finding a solution.

About Us: The Alabama Department of Mental Health serves more than 200,000 Alabama citizens with mental illnesses, intellectual disabilities, and substance use disorders. The department strives to Serve, Empower, and offer support to create awareness while promoting the health and well-being of Alabamians.

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