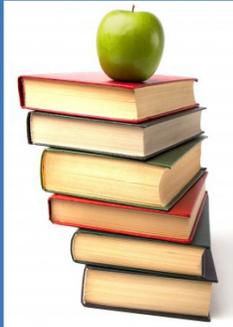


THIS ISSUE



Going back to school today makes it easier to go to work tomorrow... **1**

What CARF's standards say about supported education services **2**

About Optimae LifeServices, Inc. **4**

About the author **5**

News from CARF **6**

Going back to school today makes it easier to go to work tomorrow

By Pat L. Steele, Optimae LifeServices, Inc.

Recognition of the positive role that employment plays in promoting recovery is increasing among organizations that provide employment services for persons with mental illness. We no longer think that work should be avoided because of the stress it might cause. As a good friend observes, "If you think work is too stressful for people with mental illness, consider the stress of unemployment, poverty, and social isolation."

FINDING GOOD JOBS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IS BECOMING MORE CHALLENGING

In 1973, only about one-quarter of the American workforce needed a postsecondary degree or credential to find and hold a job. Three decades later, the figure had drifted upward to more than 50 percent. New research predicts that by 2018, 63 percent of jobs in America will require an education beyond high school. The majority of job openings for people with a high school diploma or less will be low-wage jobs, and many of these will be part-time or transitional jobs.

A study conducted by the state of Washington found that a minimum of one year of college study plus a certificate or credential is the tipping point at which an individual's income is substantially increased above an entry-level salary.

Pressure for a better educated workforce adds to the challenge of assisting people with disabilities to secure employment. As our organization, Optimae LifeServices in Des Moines, Iowa, analyzed labor market trends and data, we reviewed the educational

CARF's Employment and Community Services customer service unit annually hosts an international conference that brings together service providers, persons served, governmental professionals, and third-party payers.

CARF is sharing two presenters' stories from last year's conference in a two-part CARF Connection newsletter series. In this issue, the value of supported education is explained.

In the previous issue, CARF highlighted how an innovative autism program transformed its vision into reality.

level of the individuals referred to our organization for employment services by Polk County Health Services. Fewer than 15 percent of the job seekers referred to us had any postsecondary education. This presented a significant challenge for us in achieving a major goal of our organization—to move the persons we serve out of poverty.

Many of the individuals we serve want to work, but they often find the only employment options available to them are low-paying jobs with little hope for advancement. Their lack of postsecondary education and training is a major barrier to obtaining employment that leads to self-sufficiency. Unfortunately, when faced with the choice between being part of the working poor or the unemployed poor, many persons choose the latter, opting not to work.

CONSUMERS' CHANCES FOR EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS ARE RAISED WHEN GIVEN SUPPORTS

To address the educational gap experienced by many of the job seekers our organization serves, we developed a supported education program. The goal of supported education is to assist individuals with disabilities so that they may access and complete a postsecondary education degree or certificate program.

Although supported education programs have been in existence for over twenty years, the concept of supported education is just now beginning to emerge as an important element of an employment service. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) has recognized supported education as an exemplary practice.

Consumers of mental health services who return to school are more likely to succeed if they have some preparation and someone to whom they can turn for personal coaching and support. Although colleges and universities provide accommodations and academic counseling to all students, they usually cannot offer the personal support most students with psychiatric disabilities need to meet the challenges of returning to school.

What CARF's standards say about supported education services

Supported education reflects the assumption that education is a community resource to which all should have access. Society today has a greater emphasis on lifelong learning and development for persons to maintain employment and career development. Often there are cycles of education and career transition and development that persons pass through during their lifetime. The supported education program provides resources that help persons prepare for transitions and supports that allow them to be successful during their continued education, and it creates collaborations with other community partners to meet the needs of the persons served in educational settings.

Supported education expresses the belief that individuals can attend classes, learn, and improve their options. Practices promote participation in education programs for all who express interest. Supported education occurs in the community in settings such as an academic campus, vocational/trade school, college, and other post-secondary educational settings, and may include online learning venues. The purpose of supported education is to provide supports to individuals who are enrolled or want to enroll in an education program to achieve their learning goals. These goals may lead to persons being gainfully employed in the job or career of their choice.

The services are integrated with other services that the individual may be receiving. Follow-along supports are continuous, and the preferences of the individual guide services.

—Excerpt from the description of supported education services in the *2012 Employment and Community Services Standards Manual*

Participation in supported education is a significant factor in achieving successful employment. When provided individualized supports—such as assistance with registration, financial aid, and symptom management—many individuals can minimize their identification as a consumer of mental health services and gain a new identity as a student.

At Optimae LifeServices, we just completed our first year of providing supported education. Our program design includes both a college preparation program and ongoing support after students enroll in postsecondary education.

CLASS PREPARES JOB SEEKERS FOR COLLEGE OR VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Before consumers at Optimae LifeServices begin postsecondary education, they participate in a program called Student Success to help prepare them for either college or vocational/technical training. The course is held at a private liberal arts college in Des Moines. Holding the course on a college campus helps individuals feel like students and become familiar with a college environment, although they do not receive college credit for completing Student Success.

The Student Success training is patterned after a model developed by the University of Kansas. During eight weeks of meeting for two hours twice a week, instruction is provided on:

- Stress management techniques.
- Time management and organizational skills.
- Listening skills, learning styles, and paraphrasing.
- Career interest and education goals.
- Practical strategies for test taking and studying.
- Techniques for taking notes from a lecture and from reading.
- Writing papers.
- Computer basics and using the Internet.
- College campus resources and policies.

COLLEGE OR CERTIFICATE OPPORTUNITIES FOLLOW THE PREPARATORY TRAINING

Upon completion of the Student Success program, students have the opportunity to take noncredit or credit certificate courses at any of the colleges or postsecondary education institutions in Polk County. An Optimae LifeServices education specialist assists with enrollment, develops an educational support plan, tracks the educational progress of the student throughout the semester, and provides additional supports when needed.

Funding for the supported education program comes from Polk County Health Services, which pays for the Student Success program and the ongoing follow-along

CARF introduced standards for supported education services in the 2012 *Employment and Community Services Standards Manual.*

Current CARF standards manuals can be purchased in the Online Store at bookstore.carf.org.

Right: Student D.J. Calkins takes a communications class at Des Moines Area Community College. He is studying to become a diesel mechanic.

services. However, regulations prevent Polk County from paying for tuition for postsecondary education.

Because many of the individuals interested in supported education have limited financial resources, Optimae LifeServices has created a scholarship fund to help with tuition costs. We are also exploring the possibility of using the Social Security Plan to Achieve Self-Sufficiency (PASS) to help with tuition expenses.

Students are expected to pay for part of their education; we believe it is important that students have a level of ownership in their pursuit of postsecondary education.

ONE YEAR LATER, WE HAVE PROMISING RESULTS AND LEARNED LESSONS

During the first year of the supported education program at Optimae LifeServices:

- Sixteen persons applied for supported education.
- Thirteen persons completed Student Success.
- Six persons entered postsecondary education or completed their course of study.
- One person enrolled at a one-stop skills training class.
- Three persons became employed and plan to enroll in college.
- Three persons remain undecided about their future plans or are experiencing health problems.



About Optimae LifeServices, Inc.

For more than 22 years, Optimae LifeServices, Inc., in Iowa, www.optimaelifeservices.com, has maintained a keen focus on being at its customers' side, providing them the supports and services they need to obtain their life's goals. The organization advocates for their rights and needs. The staff members provides the depth and breadth of service and care they would want for their own families.

Optime is the root word for the organizational name and is Latin for "as best one can." That definition describes the organization's focus on helping its clients live their lives to the fullest.

Optimae has locations throughout central and southeast Iowa to provide comprehensive, customer-driven services that encourage choice, empowerment, and community integration. Services range from outpatient mental health services, home health services, behavioral health services, and opportunities for some of its clientele to do meaningful, productive work in the community.

We learned a couple of important lessons during our first year:

- Almost all the individuals we served had some academic issues, primarily in reading and math. The result was that several persons had difficulty with their coursework in postsecondary education. We now recognize that we will need to include remedial or basic adult education offerings prior to enrollment in college to address this need.
- Few students entered supported education with a clear understanding of the labor market and the types of available jobs. We need to have additional career or vocational assessments to help students identify their employment interests and abilities. We also need to provide more information to individuals to help them understand what opportunities are available in the labor market and the education and training they will need to become qualified for these positions.

Our supported education program is geared to serve individuals with mental illness, but we believe that we also need to assist people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to access college. This will require a different model than our current approach to supported education. What form that will take is unknown, but we are now beginning the inquiry. Eventually, we hope to have supported education services in place to serve all job seekers.

Supported education today is, in many respects, where supported employment was 25 to 30 years ago. Back then, it seemed difficult for some people to visualize how people with disabilities could work in the community. At present, it may be hard for some to see how people with disabilities can succeed in postsecondary education. However, we must recognize that returning to school will make it easier to go to work. Most important, the additional skills and training can help lead to a lifetime of economic stability and self-sufficiency.

**You may subscribe to
receive free new issues
of the
CARF Connection
newsletter in two delivery
formats:**

Email Subscription

RSS Feed Subscription

**Read current and recent
CARF Connection topics
at**

www.carf.org/connection



About the author

Pat L. Steele is the director of employment services with Optima LifeServices, Inc., in Des Moines, Iowa.

Since 1977, Pat has promoted employment services for people with disabilities, working for a variety of community organizations, the University of Iowa, and Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Over his career, Pat has been a sheltered workshop supervisor, program manager, contract procurement specialist, job placement counselor, director of marketing and placement, program planner, executive director, and vice president.

Pat also is a CARF surveyor, conducting more than 130 surveys in his 22 years of service.

Kayda Johnson
CHAIR,
CARF BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Brian J. Boon, Ph.D.
PRESIDENT/CEO

Paul Andrew
MANAGING DIRECTOR, EMPLOYMENT
AND COMMUNITY SERVICES

Leslie Ellis-Lang
MANAGING DIRECTOR,
CHILD AND YOUTH SERVICES

Cindy L. Johnson, CPA
CHIEF RESOURCE AND
STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT
OFFICER

Darren M. Lehrfeld
CHIEF ACCREDITATION OFFICER
AND GENERAL COUNSEL

Christine M. MacDonell
MANAGING DIRECTOR,
MEDICAL REHABILITATION

Susanne Matbiesen
MANAGING DIRECTOR,
AGING SERVICES

Nikki Migas
MANAGING DIRECTOR,
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Di Shen, Ph.D.
CHIEF RESEARCH OFFICER

Daniel Stavert
CHIEF ADVISOR, ACCREDITATION
STANDARDS, CARF CANADA

Subscriptions

Subscriptions are free.
To subscribe, complete the form
at www.carf.org/subscribe

EOE

CARF is committed to providing equal opportunity in all its employment practices, including selection, hiring, promotion, transfer, and compensation, to all qualified applicants and employees without regard to race, color, national origin, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation, ancestry, marital status, gender identity, religion, and familial and/or any other status protected by law. CARF promotes the full realization of this policy through its employment practices.

Al Whitehurst, EDITOR

Address correspondence to the editor:
awhitehurst@carf.org

www.carf.org

News from CARF

CARF AND NIATx™ FIND COMMON FOCUS ON PERSONS SERVED

The CARF International accreditation process and the NIATx model of process improvement share the same goal: to improve the lives of persons who are receiving services.

“The NIATx model for process improvement complements the CARF accreditation process,” said NIATx Deputy Director Todd Molfenter, Ph.D. “CARF’s standards promote improvement in service delivery and reflect quality practices in the field. We consistently hear that the NIATx model helps organizations conform to CARF’s standards.”

Founded in 2003 as the Network for the Improvement of Addiction Treatment, NIATx works with addiction treatment and behavioral healthcare organizations across the United States to improve access to and retention in treatment for the millions of Americans seeking help with substance abuse or mental health issues. NIATx is a learning collaborative within the University of Wisconsin–Madison Center for Health Enhancement Systems Studies.

KAYDA JOHNSON ELECTED CHAIR OF THE CARF BOARD

The CARF Board of Directors elected Kayda Johnson, chief operating officer of Senior Resource Group in Solana Beach, California, as chair of the board for a one-year term beginning January 1, 2012.

Johnson is active nationally in the senior housing industry and has leadership roles in major associations.

“CARF’s mission to enhance the lives of persons served will continue as our guiding force,” Johnson said. “We will build on CARF’s strong foundation in health and human services laid down by previous boards, CARF management, staff, and surveyors.”

Johnson succeeds Cathy Ellis, PT, who served as chair of the board for three consecutive years. She continues her board service in 2012 as past chair.

Serving in diverse health and human service fields, the 11 members of the CARF board bring unique and valuable experience to their governance roles.

Copyright

©2012 by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities. All rights reserved.

The content of this publication is protected by copyright law in the U.S. and elsewhere.

Permission to reprint material from the CARF Connection is freely granted provided that appropriate credit is given.