

Getting to Work

Expanding employment and housing
in a changing HIV epidemic



HOPWA
Housing Opportunities
for Persons With AIDS



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Understanding the Value of Employment

Employment is an essential focus within the coordinated response to HIV/AIDS, both within the U.S. and around the globe. HIV/AIDS housing and service providers are increasingly recognizing that employment is a key component of serving the whole person.

Employment can be critical to improving the economic and personal well-being of people living with and most at risk of HIV/AIDS. It has been shown to impact health and can increase a person's ability to live a satisfying, productive and meaningful life. Employment can also increase financial self-sufficiency and reduce reliance on publicly funded benefits and other services.



“It empowers me, it gives me back a voice that I thought I lost.”

- Cecilia Chung, Transgender Law Center

What are Employment Services?

“Employment services” is a general term that encompasses a range of activities that facilitate employment for individuals. Employment services are used by both job seekers and employers and are sometimes called job services or workforce development services. HIV/AIDS service providers focusing on strengthening the capacity of PLWHA to find and maintain employment in order to enter or reenter the workforce are engaging in employment services.

Range of Employment Services:

- Vocational Assessment
- Education or Vocational Training
- “Soft Skills” Development (communication, professionalism)
- Identification of Employment Opportunities
- Job Placement
- Job Retention and Job Coaching
- Resume Development
- Interviewing Skills
- Ongoing Career Development
- Job Accommodations
- Benefits Planning

Effective Employment Services:

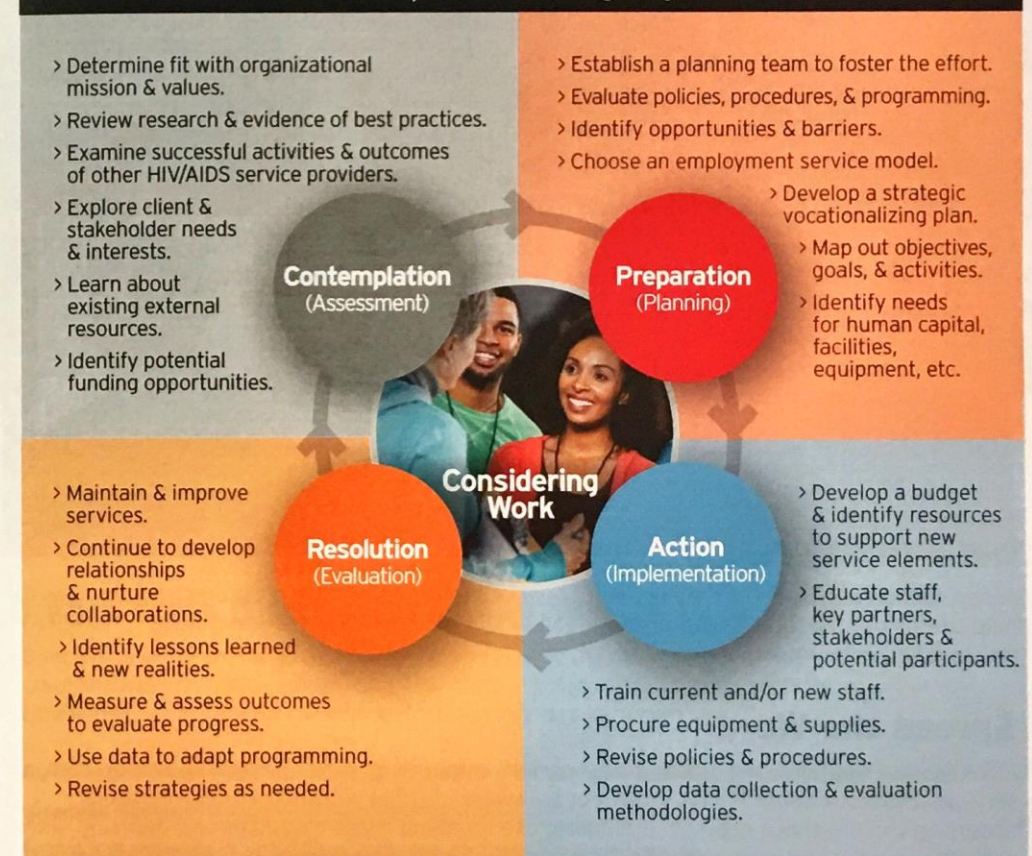
- Meet people where they are at regarding their process of pursuing employment
- Acknowledge the specific challenges that PLWHA face when seeking and maintaining employment
- Support job seekers in navigating important considerations related to medical, legal, financial, psychosocial, and vocational issues
- Identify individual interests, values, strengths, barriers and job readiness to assist job seekers in making well-informed decisions about employment
- Provide information and guidance about employment-related legal protections that cover PLWHA
- Address concerns and fears regarding benefits such as SSDI/SSI, housing subsidies, and health care through planning efforts

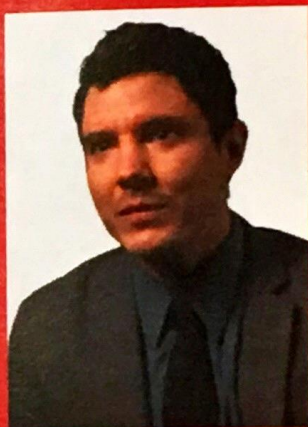
Adopting an Employment Mentality

“Vocationalizing” is a term used to describe the process a service provider undergoes as it begins to evaluate the employment services needs of its clients and develop strategies for meeting them. Many providers have successfully “vocalized”—in other words, developed employment programs based on a thorough assessment of their clients’ needs.

The Vocationalizing Process

Unique for Each Agency





“ So many of the things that service providers can do today do not require any funding, they just require conversations or sometimes just adding something to a form. ”

- Dylan Orr, U.S. Department of Labor

Learn from Successful Initiatives

Successful program initiatives enhance services by collaborating with existing local and state mainstream employment services, legal services and benefits counseling programs, advocates, initiatives for people with disabilities and other groups.

Read more from the Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy:

Success Stories: www.dol.gov/odep/topics/HIVAIDS/success/

HIV/AIDS Providers with Employment or Training Services:
www.dol.gov/odep/pdf/HIVAIDSServiceOrganizationsETA.pdf

Lessons Learned from the HOPWA Getting to Work Employment Initiative

The HOPWA Getting to Work Employment Initiative was a year-long capacity building project supported by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. The eight HOPWA housing and service provider teams were able to increase their ability to directly deliver employment services or build strong connections and refer clients to existing mainstream services.

Get more information on the HOPWA Getting to Work Employment Initiative here: www.vpi.org/tap/gettingtowork/.



Outcomes Achieved:

463

clients received employment related services

110

clients obtained employment

79

partnerships were established

Lessons Learned and Action Steps

Lesson 1: Vocationalizing

Vocationalizing - embedding employment-related expectations, practice, and service delivery into all facets of program operation and culture - is an essential first step towards incorporating employment services into service delivery.

- STEP 1:** Identify a champion to be the lead staff person that creates a vision for employment services, ensures all stakeholders understand the goal, and creates buy-in across all agency levels.
- STEP 2:** Initiate conversations with staff about the impacts and benefits of vocationalizing and how to re-focus and adapt their skill sets and priorities.
- STEP 3:** Sustain the vocationalizing effort by incorporating employment into all aspects of program delivery.

Lesson 2: Employment Specialist

An employment services staff person is a critical component to successful implementation and helps to ensure the long-term sustainability of a program.

- STEP 1:** Designate and fund a staff person specifically for employment services to allow employment services to be prioritized without competing case management concerns.
- STEP 2:** Seek out additional funding or re-purpose existing funds to support the position.

Lesson 3: Intake and Assessment

Employment readiness is critical for client engagement and job attainment. With limited staff resources, it is imperative to identify clients who are ready and willing to engage around work.

- STEP 1:** Assess a client's abilities and readiness using vocational assessment tools to understand the client's skills, interests, and strengths and to work with the client to help them develop a realistic sense of the work world.
- STEP 2:** Identify clients who are ready to take action to maximize resources on those who are poised to make progress. Revisit the issue with clients lacking readiness at a later date.

Lesson 4: Interagency Collaborations and Partnerships

Building collaborations with mainstream workforce services expands agency capacity to effectively engage, prepare, and support clients as they participate in these services.

- STEP 1:** Ensure that designated staffers have extensive knowledge on the mainstream workforce system by developing an understanding of eligibility criteria and service participation requirements.
- STEP 2:** Advocate for client needs and employability by articulating the unique needs and the medical advances that have improved the health of PLWHA.
- STEP 3:** Pursue cross-system partnerships. Formalized, contractual partnerships provide opportunities for agencies to access mainstream services.

Lesson 5: Knowledge of Benefits

Understanding the impact of earned income on benefits (SSDI/SSI, health insurance, etc.) improves client motivation and diminishes staff and client fear of negative consequences to employment.

- STEP 1:** Understand that each client's situation is highly individualized and that many clients may wind up ahead financially, maintaining some or all of existing benefits. Staff members need to comprehend the basic rules regarding work and know where to find answers to more detailed questions.
- STEP 2:** Disseminate consistent and accurate information around benefits and work to help de-mystify the issue for both clients and staff.



Connect with More Resources on HIV & Employment

Getting to Work: A Training Curriculum for HIV/AIDS Service Providers and Housing Providers:
www.hudexchange.info/training-events/dol-hud-getting-to-work-curriculum-for-hiv-aids-providers

HOPWA Getting to Work Employment Initiative: www.vpi.org/tap/gettingtowork

Employment and Living with HIV/AIDS - The Business Case:
www.dol.gov/odep/topics/hivaids/businesscase.pdf

Employment and Living with HIV/AIDS - Resource Guide:
www.dol.gov/odep/topics/hivaids/employmentlivingwithHIVAIDS.pdf

Social Security Administration Work Site: www.ssa.gov/work/home.html

AIDS.gov Employment Discrimination Online Resource:
www.aids.gov/hiv-aids-basics/staying-healthy-with-hiv-aids/discrimination/workplace-issues/index.html

Department of Justice Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Online Resource: www.ada.gov/aids/index.htm

Workplace Flexibility Toolkit from DoL Office of Disability Employment Policy:
www.dol.gov/odep/workplaceflexibility/

Medicaid Employment Initiatives: www.medicaid.gov/Medicaid-CHIP-Program-Information/By-Topics/Delivery-Systems/Grant-Programs/Employment-Initiatives.html

American Job Center Network Locator: jobcenter.usa.gov/

Job Accommodation Network: askjan.org/

Work Incentives: www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/generalinfo.htm

Section 3 Business Registry: portalapps.hud.gov/Sec3BusReg/BRegistry/BRegistryHome



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www.hud.gov / www.hudexchange.info