



Young Adult Individualized Placement and Support Services with Peer Mentors: A Developing Evidence Based Practice for Supporting Educational and Employment Attainment

The Thresholds Young Adult Program (YAP) is a Transition to Independence (TIP) informed residential psychiatric treatment program for young people between the ages of 16 and 21 located in Chicago. YAP provides residential, education, employment, case management and therapeutic services to roughly 60 young adults each year. All YAP consumers meet criteria for a DSM-IV Axis I diagnosis and approximately 60 percent are wards of the state. For the past three years, YAP has used the evidence-based Individualized Placement and Support (IPS) employment model which is effective in helping adult consumers with severe mental illness obtain and maintain competitive employment.

In the past year, YAP's IPS services have been modified as part of a research project through the Learning and Working During the Transition to Adulthood Rehabilitation Research and Training Center under the direction of Maryann Davis, Ph.D., at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. The goal of the research is to specify and standardize modifications to IPS services targeted to the needs of this age (16–21 yrs) and disability group (serious mental health conditions) and to eventually test its efficacy compared to usual practices. Consistent with the version of IPS that was developed for mostly young adults experiencing their first episode of psychosis (IPS-FEP), direct service staff provide support for consumers who are interested either educational activities, employment, or both. This IPS-FEP model is augmented by the strategic use of Peer Mentors. The primary goal of the Peer Mentoring component is to improve the employment and educational outcomes of young adults engaged in IPS-FEP services.

Peer mentors provide critical peer social support, encouragement, role-modeling and guidance to facilitate young adults' engagement in vocational activities that achieve their goals. At intake to the IPS-FEP services, young adults are matched to a peer mentor. Peer Mentors are young adult graduates of the Thresholds programs. Mentors and mentees meet, on average, once a week. Peer Mentoring work predominantly takes place in the community. Peer mentors engage young adults in specific activities aimed to motivate engagement in vocational services while simultaneously role modeling social skills in the "real world."

Peer Mentoring activities are based on the IPS model and include 5 modules. For example, after a young adult begins a job, a peer mentor will assist the mentee with learning about the culture at the new work place and job expectations by sharing his or her own experiences with starting new jobs. Topics discussed may include the importance of knowing how to act at work, who to talk to if a problem arises on the job, and how to get promoted. Peer mentors engage in these stage-based activities while also using active listening and validation of mentee experiences with vocational services and employment processes.

For more information about the IPS, or IPS-FEP models, the current Peer Mentoring model, Thresholds, and the Transitions RTC, follow these links:

<http://www.thresholds.org/>

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~ips/>

<http://labs.umassmed.edu/transitionsRTC>



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