

Job Retention Factors for Homeless People with Significant Disabilities

A Collaborative Research Study Between Boston University and Community Work Services, Inc.

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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to study the factors that contribute to job retention and sustained employment for persons who are homeless and have a significant disability. Unemployment rates, wage levels, benefits, and educational levels for individuals with disabilities are unacceptably low when compared to the general population. Access to quality jobs with decent wages is lower still for individuals with disabilities who are homeless, or who reside in supported or subsidized housing. Although homelessness and disability significantly impact a person's capacity to work competitively and are associated with high rates of unemployment and low wages (McCarriston, 1996), a recent demonstration program with hard-to-employ homeless people with disabilities has provided evidence that successful competitive employment is feasible for this population (McCarriston, 2000). Findings from this project suggest that individuals who are homeless and have significant disabilities can obtain competitive employment, but face significant obstacles to job retention and sustained employment.

Job retention is examined as an important aspect of recovery and independence for homeless persons with a significant disability (McCarriston, 2000) and is defined as the ability to sustain employment and/or to identify, obtain, and retain quality jobs that provide satisfaction, independence, and opportunity for advancement (Hursh & Shrey, 1999). The proposed project seeks to study the major factors that promote or limit job retention and sustained employment for approximately 200 homeless individuals with significant disabilities who have successfully transitioned from unemployment to competitive employment and permanent housing. The project is an expansion of our HUD funded longitudinal study of vocational rehabilitation (1996-2002) that will increase current knowledge about successful and sustained employment for homeless people with disabilities. The proposed project will achieve the following goals:

- Goal One :** To study the relationship between successful job retention and the individual characteristics and coping strategies of homeless people with significant disabilities.
- Goal Two:** To study the relationship between successful job retention and different workplace supports, program services, and homeless resources used by homeless people with disabilities.
- Goal Three:** To study how specific individual characteristics, and different workplace and program supports and resources, interact to influence job retention and sustained employment
- Goal Four:** To disseminate results of the study to employment and vocational rehabilitation programs, homeless resources, workforce development programs, advocacy groups, and interested stakeholders.

The proposed project represents a continuation and expansion of our innovative research and development programs for homeless persons with disabilities who have been successful in obtaining competitive employment and who demonstrate capacity to sustain employment. Information from this research is expected to expand existing knowledge both about the individual factors influencing acquisition and retention of jobs, and the different workplace supports, programs, and resources that influence this process. Such information would be of vital importance to the effective delivery of vocational rehabilitation services with this population. At the same time, this information is expected to provide the basis for the design of future employment studies to examine strategies to optimize the capacity of homeless people with disabilities to obtain and sustain quality employment.