



Building a career of your choice

recovery through work



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This booklet has been edited for the UK market by Eric Wodke (Nottinghamshire Health Care Trust) with support from Ian Kingsbury at the Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care - Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Lincolnshire (CLAHRC-NDL) which is funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR). Co-editing has been undertaken by Geoffrey Waghorn whose support, guidance and enthusiasm we greatly appreciate.

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www.sph.uq.edu.au/about/profile.asp

www.qcmhr.uq.edu.au

The design and layout of this booklet were developed by Zoe Staddon at QCMHR. The authors acknowledge the valuable contribution of West Moreton and Darling Downs Health Service District mental health service users, mental health case managers, and vocational specialists, who participated in focus group discussions used to design this resource. Some quotes used in this booklet were sourced from Taking the First Step: A guidebook for jobseekers with experience of mental health issues published by Like Minds Employment Advocacy Project (LEAP) in New Zealand.

Printing of this booklet in England was funded by the Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care - Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Lincolnshire:



www.clahrc-ndl.nihr.ac.uk

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Using this booklet

Intended readers

This booklet is written for people with mental health conditions who, like other community residents, want to have a regular working life. It will also be useful for health professionals, friends, carers and family members as it will help them understand how the many challenges to building a career can be overcome, and how access to the most suitable forms of employment assistance can be arranged at no cost to the person seeking assistance.

Aims of this booklet

This booklet aims to help you take the first steps towards competitive employment in the open labour market, and can provide guidance to help you find the most appropriate forms of assistance. If you feel you need assistance to get and keep your preferred job, it is important you try to get this assistance to increase your chances of success and having a rewarding career. There will be many challenges, but with persistence and appropriate support, you can increase your chances of long term success in employment.

Employment and recovery

- **The importance of employment**
- **Personal and health benefits of employment**
- **How your employment helps employers and the wider community**



The importance of employment

Our community values employment as an important way for everyone to contribute to society, to become more financially independent, and to have a meaningful role in the community. Employment is not the only valued social role. For instance parenting, caring for other adults, living independently, or studying, are also valued by the community. Valued roles provide an opportunity to escape the negative labels of mental health patient, or welfare recipient.

It doesn't matter if you are working full time or only a couple of hours a week. Work can build your confidence and make you feel included in society. As more people with mental health conditions start working, the sooner society will realise that we are as valuable and capable as others

Marty

Many people with mental health conditions, who have succeeded in employment, say how important it is for their recovery even when the limitations of a mental health condition are present and treatment is not fully successful. Recovery is a way of living a satisfying, hopeful, and contributing life even with the limitations caused by a mental health condition.

Recovery involves the development of new meaning and purpose as one grows beyond the life-disrupting impacts of a mental health condition.

Personal and health benefits of employment

People with a mental health condition have reported many benefits of employment. Some of these are listed below.

- Having more money to pay for your expenses.
- Feeling new meaning and purpose in your life.
- Increasing your independence, self-esteem and confidence around people.
- Preventing boredom by having enjoyable activities to do and a regular time structure to the week. This can help in managing your symptoms by reducing the time spent dwelling on unpleasant thoughts or feelings.
- Learning something new every day.
- Increasing a sense of empowerment and control over your life.
- Meeting new people and making new friends.
- Contributing to the community.
- Increasing work skills.
- Increasing career opportunities.



Research shows that having a satisfying job with challenges that can be managed, can be good for your mental health and personal development.

Working has helped my recovery in so many ways. It has built my self-esteem, given me financial stability, introduced me to a network of friends, given me something else to focus on besides my mental health condition and provided me with opportunities I never thought I was capable of. I would recommend it to everyone.

Juliette

How your employment helps employers and the wider community

Everyone has skills and abilities that can make them valuable to an employer. Even if you don't feel you have any particular skills or abilities at this time, even the motivation to get and keep a good job, and willingness to learn as much as possible, can be an important asset to an employer.

The community benefits when everyone who wants to work is employed. The community also benefits when all citizens feel equally included in their community at both a local and national level.

Making the decision to seek employment

- You can succeed in employment
- You don't need to wait until you are completely well and confident
- Questions about employment



You can succeed in employment

In previous years many people, including health professionals, believed that employment was not a realistic goal for a person diagnosed with a severe mental health condition. However, research over the past 15 years has shown that almost everyone with a mental health condition who attempts employment, with the appropriate support, can succeed. There is no recognised sub-group of people who cannot succeed, apart from those who decide it is not for them at the time. This means that **wanting a job is the first step towards success.**

Research over the past 15 years has shown that almost everyone with a mental health condition who attempts employment, with the appropriate assistance, can succeed.

You might find getting a job and performing well at work challenging at first, but with the right support, persistence and determination, a satisfying and enjoyable career is possible. For example: Stephen Fry, Vincent Van Gough, Winston Churchill, Buzz Aldrin, Sinéad O'Connor, Ruby Wax, Axl Rose and Alistair Campbell all achieved great things in their working lives despite their mental health conditions.

You don't need to wait until you are completely well and confident

Many people can work part-time despite symptoms and the side effects of medication. If you are not sure whether you want to attempt this yet, you can talk to your care co-ordinator and to an employment specialist about the types of help available. There are many people with quite severe disabilities and health conditions who are successfully employed and are achieving their own goals at their own pace.

One of the first steps is to find out more about the forms of help available and how this assistance can help you.

Some people think once they have a mental health condition it is all over. They believe they cannot work due to their symptoms and they lose the confidence they once had. This is not true. You don't need to wait until you are completely well and once you start working your confidence starts to build.

Juliette

Questions about employment

Will work be too stressful and make me unwell?

Research shows that with good job selection, appropriate support and time to get established, working need not increase your symptoms or increase your risk of being hospitalised. However, any changes in your life can be stressful at first. In time, the right job can even help you to manage your symptoms and increase your wellness. It is important you tell your care co-ordinator when you are about to start work so that they can help when needed.

Most people with a severe mental health condition work part-time for, on average, about 15 hours per week. Some people can manage full-time work. Others need to try a job to find out how many hours per week are best for them. Many employers permit casual and part-time work and are flexible with preferred hours, particularly if they know you are restricted by a health condition.



Will I have to work in a job I don't like?

You will not be expected to stay in a job that you do not value and enjoy. If you know the type of job you do not like, use this information to help you think of jobs you might like to try. An employment specialist will ask you about your job preferences so they can make a short list of jobs that you are willing to try.

Each work trial and every experience in employment is a career learning experience which can help you decide whether a particular job is part of your career plan.

Each work trial and every experience in employment is a career learning experience which can help you decide whether a particular job is part of your career plan. The aim is to find an enjoyable and rewarding career that will keep you satisfied for several years or more.

All jobs have routine tasks that can seem mundane. This does not mean the job is boring. Successful workers try

to become reliable, efficient and skilled in a particular job so that they feel valued and capable of taking on additional responsibilities. It might take a while to find a job with the right balance of routine and challenge, so be patient. If many duties are too challenging, you might find the job too stressful in the long term. If a job is too routine and not stimulating enough, you can lose interest. In either case, you can sometimes ask your Line Manager if it is possible to change the mix of duties towards a more ideal balance for you.

How does employment affect my welfare benefits?

How your employment affects your current benefit payments depends on the type of payments you receive and your personal circumstances. People are almost always better off when employed as long as all financial implications are anticipated. You can ask Jobcentre Plus staff to provide information about likely changes to your benefits once you know how much you will be earning. Jobcentre Plus staff can undertake a 'better off calculation' that can assist you to work out how your welfare benefits may be affected by your earnings. An employment specialist can also help you to gather this information. Things to consider are mentioned below.

Don't be afraid that you will be worse off financially because of having your benefits docked.

Generally you are better off and it feels good not to be dependent on benefits.

Marama

- You're obligated to tell Jobcentre Plus about your employment. You can provide Jobcentre Plus with details of your start date and earnings by telephone.
- You can sometimes continue to receive some welfare benefit payments while you are working.
- ATW (Access to Work) may help with support needs in the workplace.

- Your earnings do not directly displace your welfare benefit payments. You can earn up to a certain amount before your payments are reduced. The amount you can earn before this occurs depends on your circumstances (e.g., whether you are single, in a couple, or have children) and the type of payment you receive (e.g. Permitted work, Supported Permitted Work). Income exceeding this amount reduces your benefit payment, again depending on your circumstances and the type of benefits you receive.
- You may qualify for other incentives such as working tax credits. You can telephone or visit your local Jobcentre to discuss these incentives.
- If you think Jobcentre Plus staff may have made a mistake in assessing your earnings, you can contact them to arrange a review of that decision by the original decision maker.
- More information about reviews and appeals can be found on the Jobcentre Plus website:



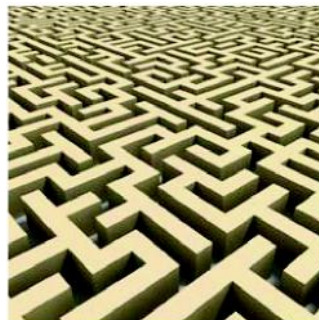
www.direct.gov.uk

- You may also need to notify your housing authority if you receive housing benefit. This is because rent subsidies are usually income tested independently of your benefit payments.

- Other costs of going to work can include travel, uniforms, clothing, tools and meal arrangements. Try to estimate these costs.
- Your earnings are taxable.
- If you are working as a subcontractor you may have to set more money aside to pay for workplace insurance and other work-related expenses normally provided by an employer.
- If your earnings change because your work hours vary, or because you become unwell, you will need to notify Jobcentre Plus staff so that your benefit payments can be correctly adjusted. Failing to do this in the time allowed can lead to an underpayment or an overpayment.

Don't hesitate to ask Jobcentre Plus staff or your employment specialist to help you understand your legal obligations and help make use of all the incentives available.

There are other rules that apply, so don't hesitate to ask Jobcentre Plus staff or your employment specialist to help you understand your legal obligations and to help you to make use of all the incentives available.



What about my lack of recent work experience and relevant skills?

If you have never worked or have not worked in a long time, with assistance you will be able to get and keep a valued job. For many entry level jobs, all the skills and knowledge required can be taught once the job commences.

While it is good to have skills that will help at work, research shows that it is not necessary to do any training before starting many jobs.

While it is good to have skills that will help at work, research shows that it is not necessary to do any training before starting many jobs. Once you commence a job and know what is required, training can be arranged either with your work supervisor or employment consultant to help you develop the skills required of the job. You don't need to wait until you feel you have the skills to commence employment. If your employer knows

you have a health condition they will usually allow more time for you to learn the job thoroughly.

There may be gaps in your work history when you have been unwell. An employment specialist can help you to account for these gaps in your CV and in your job application. The employment specialist can also help you to find jobs that are most suitable for you in line with your skills and preferences. An employment specialist can often help by finding jobs that are not advertised, or by making arrangements with employers that enable you to bypass the usual recruiting process.

Will I have to tell my employer I have a mental health condition?



This question is related to a more general challenge about how best to manage your privacy and personal information at work. From an employer's perspective, there are legal and ethical requirements you need to consider. From an equally important worker rights perspective, you are legally entitled to be treated fairly in the workplace without stigma or unfair discrimination.

If you have a health condition that restricts your activities at work, you will either need to choose a job where you have no work restrictions, or find a way to discuss these with employers, supervisors and co-workers. An employment specialist can help you make a good plan for managing personal information. Provided you meet your legal and ethical obligations to both the employment specialist and to the employer, you can choose how you will discuss your work restrictions and health conditions with an employer.

Building confidence and motivation for employment

You may be unsure about working because you feel low in confidence and may be thinking that you won't be able to learn a job well enough to succeed in employment. However, it is

It is important to decide whether employment is your preferred goal even if your confidence is currently low.

usual to feel this way in the beginning, especially if you have been out of the workforce for a long time. Both a mental health condition and a long absence from employment can decrease your confidence. Your confidence may be more impaired than your actual ability to perform well at work with appropriate assistance. It is important to decide whether

employment is your preferred goal even if your confidence is currently low.

Finding the courage to take a reasonable risk and seek employment with assistance is sometimes the hardest step. There are things you can do to help build your confidence, some are outlined below.

- **Write down all the advantages to you of employment** and keep this list somewhere handy such as on the fridge. This way, you'll keep thinking about the benefits of work and this will help you stay motivated towards employment.

- Write down a list of all your strengths, positive qualities and skills that would be an asset to an employer. You might like to ask people who believe in you, to add to your list. Every time you feel low or lacking in confidence, try to add another item to the list. Just being able to think clearly about how you can best manage yourself in the workplace is a quality many employers value.
- When you have a clear employment goal, or are linked to an employment specialist, tell your family and friends and ask for their support. Tell them about the specific ways they can help you. You may also give them this booklet so they are well informed and are willing to help you achieve your career goals.



- Prepare for when you are working. Try to catch up on jobs around home and plan to do all the other activities you want to complete before you start work. This is important because once you are employed you may have less time for these activities.

Services to help you find and keep a job

- Deciding to get help or find employment on your own
- How health professionals can help
- Accessing suitable employment services
- Self employment opportunities
- Options other than competitive employment



Deciding to get help, or finding employment on your own

Job searching is challenging for everyone. Fortunately, professional help is available to people with a mental health condition to help them get and keep suitable employment. People who use this assistance are usually more successful than people who prefer to get a job without help.

In England, there are government funded employment services that help people with a mental health condition to obtain and keep employment. Visit the websites listed in the Contacts section at the back of this booklet to help create a list of services in your area. Because these services are government funded, there are no costs to service users.

My advice for others who are thinking of looking for work – join an employment service and believe in yourself. Sometimes it takes time so believe you can do it.

Paul

An employment specialist from one of these services can help you every step of the way. They are usually experienced in helping people with a mental health condition and will know about the issues that might be concerning you. They also have many contacts with employers and know how to help you successfully, and in a shorter time than when people do this

alone. Employment specialists will only provide you with forms of assistance that you agree would be helpful to you.

If you decide to obtain employment on your own, there are several ways you can do this, these are listed below.

- Seek help through your local Job Centre.
- Search the internet or newspapers for job vacancies.
- Approach businesses directly yourself.
- Seek advice from an independent recruitment consultant or career counsellor in your local area.

You may also discuss your work goals with your mental health care co-ordinator or support worker and they may be able to offer helpful suggestions based on their knowledge of you and opportunities in the local area.

How health professionals can help



Health professionals such as general practitioners, care co-ordinators and mental health clinicians, can help monitor your mental health and your treatment and recovery plan. Employment can be challenging and

even stressful in the first few weeks, so it is important that you discuss your employment plans, and any issues or concerns about your mental health with your health professional.

Health professionals can help you further as outlined below.

Research shows that, when asked, as many as 7 out of 10 service users say they want to find a job.

- Asking about your employment goals. Research shows that, when asked, as many as 7 out of 10 service users say they want to find a job.
- Valuing your employment goals and believing in the possibility of success in employment.
- Encouraging and supporting you to take reasonable risks by seeking appropriate assistance, trying a new job, and finding ways to perform well at work while managing your mental health.
- Monitoring your mental health and reviewing your care plan soon after you commence employment.
- Learning more about evidence-based approaches to supported employment.
- Helping you to identify performance challenges at work and considering whether changing the care plan could further improve work performance.
- Being available to communicate regularly with your employment consultant so that everyone is clear about the goals, activities and the assistance being provided.
- Writing brief reports when required to identify your employment assistance needs so that you can obtain the best assistance available.

Accessing suitable employment services

There are two main ways you can access suitable employment services to help you find and keep a job.

1. Contact your local Job Centre (Disability Employment Advisor) as the first step, or
2. Contact your care co-ordinator as the first step.

Contacting Jobcentre Plus

You can begin by contacting Jobcentre Plus in person to inform them you are now looking for employment. Depending on your circumstances, they may arrange an appointment for you with a Work Capability Assessment provider who will then interview you to assess your capacity to work. This interview is called a Work Capability Assessment.

This assessment aims to match you to the most appropriate type of employment assistance. It is important to be honest about your health conditions, work restrictions, and likely need for assistance to get and keep a job. The assessor will need a brief report from a treating health professional in order to complete the assessment. You can take a friend, advocate, family member, employment specialist, or health professional with you to this assessment. You are free to make a list of the different ways you may need assistance with employment and take this with you to the interview. The more information you provide about your difficulties when you are not so well, the greater your chances of receiving an accurate assessment of your support needs.

The Work Capability Assessment should be a brief, pleasant and informative experience for both you and the assessor. A Jobcentre Plus Benefit Delivery Decision Maker will refer you to the most suitable forms of support according to the information received about your needs. For people with a mental health condition, one of the best types of support you could be referred to is a Disability Employment Advisor (DEA).

DEA's can provide ongoing support to help people keep jobs or obtain a better job. Research shows that staying in touch with an employment specialist for as long as needed after getting a job, improves the chances of doing well at work and keeping the job in the long term. Other types of employment services include Work Choice and Work Programme providers. These services will also help you prepare for employment and find a job, but are limited in their ability to provide post-employment support.

Research shows that staying in touch with an employment specialist for as long as needed after getting a job, improves the chance of doing well at work and keeping the job in the long term.

Your local DEA can provide details of these services in your area.

Contacting your care co-ordinator

You can also contact your care co-ordinator directly to inform them you are looking for employment. There is room in the back of this booklet to record the contact details of your care co-ordinator. Your care co-ordinator can play a vital role in encouraging and supporting you to access mainstream employment opportunities.

They are able to provide information for your employment plan to help you and your employment specialist make better job matches - sharing information about symptoms or side effects of medication can help you make the transition to work and ensure you get the right support when you need it. They can assist you to contact the local Individual Placement and Support (IPS) - Supported Employment service.

Self employment opportunities

Some people prefer to be self employed. If this is your goal, you can also ask for assistance from an employment specialist. Services provided by Business Link are designed to help job seekers establish self employment in a viable business:



www.businesslink.gov.uk

Self employment means you can be your own boss. However, the downside is that you also have to perform all the roles involved from sales, record keeping and tax accountancy, through to marketing and management.



Together these roles can require a lot of time and energy especially in the early stages of starting a business.

The opportunities for self employment are increasing rapidly with the expansion of the internet, and the availability of work from home using a computer. It is also possible to make a living buying and selling over the internet through sites such as E-bay, or by selling unique products at local markets. The key to this type of business is product knowledge, and knowing the market value of particular product lines. It may also help to learn directly from someone who is already successful in this type of self employment.

Options other than competitive employment

Voluntary work

This booklet aims to support people looking for mainstream competitive employment in the open labour market. In previous years many people doubted that competitive employment was possible for people with a mental health condition and voluntary work was often recommended.

Research now shows that competitive employment is possible no matter how severe the health condition. Furthermore, people who do well in voluntary work are also likely to succeed in competitive employment. This means that voluntary work as an option is not needed as a step towards competitive employment.

Voluntary work options can help you to learn new skills, build confidence and gain some relevant work experience.

Nevertheless, you may prefer to work in a voluntary capacity. Voluntary work can help you to learn new skills, build confidence and gain some relevant work experience.

You can start by searching the internet for local volunteering opportunities. Staff at your local library can assist. Organisations such as Volunteering England or Community Service Volunteer may be able to help you find a voluntary position. You can also ask your local not-for-profit organisations directly about voluntary positions available.



www.volunteering@volunteering.org.uk

www.csv.org.uk

Once you are linked to a suitable employment service

- The role of the employment Specialist
- What the best employment services will do for you
- When you don't know what type of job you want
- Job applications and interviews
- Employer requirements



The role of the employment specialist

Most employment services will assign you to an employment specialist who will help you to identify and achieve your employment goals. Your employment specialist will usually have considerable knowledge and expertise and can help with all stages of the job seeking process as outlined below.

- Identify your employment goals.
- Plan how to manage your personal information.
- Identify your work skills and job preferences.

In addition, employment specialists can often help with other aspects of your life that make employment more challenging for you. They will also communicate with your care coordinator to ensure that your health care plan and the employment plan work together. It is important that you discuss any concerns that you may have about employment with your employment specialist. The more quickly they get to know you and your strengths, as well as your assistance needs, the more effectively they can help you.

Your employment specialist will help you through all aspects of gaining and retaining employment. Once you commence employment, help can be provided at work or outside the workplace.

What the best employment services will do for you

Employment services that achieve the best results usually use the latest methods that are supported by research evidence. These methods are called evidence-based practices. See the reference to Rinaldi, Miller, Perkins (2010) at the end of this booklet for more information about evidence-based practices. The best employment services in England try to apply the principles described below.

- **Eligibility is based on service user choice as much as possible.** This means that if you say you want help to get a job, the employment service will not attempt to assess your work readiness in order to decide whether you can receive assistance or not, they will support you to get a job.
- **Supported employment is integrated with treatment.** This means that the employment specialist may be co-located with the treatment team, or may stay in close contact with your care co-ordinator so that vocational assistance and continuing health care continue to be closely coordinated.
- **Competitive employment is the goal.** This means that the first goal is paid part time or full time employment in the open labour market. You will not be asked to consider voluntary work, jobs that pay less than minimum wage, or jobs reserved for people with disabilities, unless you decide that is your preference.

- **Rapid job search.** This means that with the help of an employment specialist, you will be starting to contact employers to discuss and apply for jobs within four weeks of approaching an employment service. You will not be asked to attend any prevocational training if this is not needed, so as not to further delay starting a job of your choice.

An employment specialist can often help by finding jobs that are not advertised, or by making arrangements that enable you to bypass the usual recruiting process.

- **Job finding is individualised.** This means that you will be given one-on-one assistance by an employment specialist, who will not require you to attend groups for the purpose of job preparation or job searching, unless you want that type of assistance. You will be provided with forms of assistance that you agree would be helpful to you.

- **Ongoing / follow-up supports are provided.** This means that the employment specialist will not abandon you once you have started a job. Once you are working they will provide assistance to you for as long as you need it. In addition, even if you no longer require assistance at work they will stay in touch with you so that they can help you quickly if your circumstances change.
- **Financial planning is provided.** Before you commence employment, the employment specialist will help you identify all the financial incentives and disincentives of going to work. This is to ensure that you are clear about your financial situation, and understand how your earnings will affect your existing income and benefit entitlements.

Work and employment remain the primary means through which people connect with their communities and build their lives. Finding you have something to give as well as needing help is central to building a positive sense of self esteem and this is at the heart of RECOVERY.

Centre for Mental Health, 2008



When you don't know what type of job you want

The employment specialist will spend some time finding out about you and your job preferences. If you have had no recent employment experience or are not sure what you want to do, the employment specialist will try to identify a short list of jobs you are willing to try. Sometimes this means first identifying the jobs you don't want. It can be very helpful to know about these. Work trials can then be arranged so that you can fully explore how much you like a particular job and how well it fits with your career plan. Treating the first job as a work trial can be important because otherwise you might feel pressured to stay in a job which may not turn out to fit your skills, interests or work preferences.



Job applications and job interviews

Your employment specialist will help you identify suitable jobs, and will help you prepare a CV and formal job applications when required. If a formal job interview is



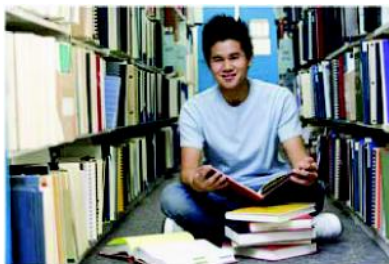
required, the employment specialist will usually rehearse this with you until you are able to participate with confidence.

One of the most helpful things an employment specialist can do is to contact employers on your behalf and arrange a paid work trial.

One of the most helpful things they can do is to contact prospective employers on your behalf and arrange a paid work trial.

This is important because sometimes employers are willing to set aside their usual recruitment procedures in order to give you the chance to show how well you can work. This can be a big advantage because otherwise many people with a history of a mental health condition would not even be selected for a job interview, due to lack of related experience.

In addition, there are many books available in bookshops and in libraries, and articles on the internet that can help you prepare a CV and a job application, and help you prepare for a job interview.



The employment specialist is best able to show you how to apply for a particular job and how to best present your strengths and motivation to learn a new job, without making inaccurate promises that you may not keep. Even if your application is unsuccessful, you can ask for feedback from the employer about all aspects of your application and interview, so that you can be more competitive for this type of job in future applications. If you decide to approach employers directly with your CV, there are a couple of things you can do to make this easier.

1. Do not ask an employer for a job until you have identified the type of jobs available, and the types of person and skill sets needed by the employer. Finding out about this is called **job research**. Start by finding out about employers from their brochures, and from the internet. Then ask employers about the attributes and skills required of workers, and whether they are trained on the job or need to bring specific skills and qualifications. If skills are needed, try to find out about what the employer thinks is the best way to obtain these skills. For instance, there may be a particular vocational course that the employer values. Once you are clear about what skills are required and that you have at least some of those core skills, try to arrange a time to visit the employer in person.

2. Some people have success **calling on workplaces without an appointment**. This is called cold calling and can be successful if you already know a lot about the industry, the business and the skills usually required of job applicants at that workplace.



Stay positive by remembering that every job application can bring you one step closer to a job start.

All aspects of job searching can be very challenging and frustrating, particularly in industries where there is a shortage of jobs. Try not to get frustrated with job knock-backs, especially if you have been looking for a long time. Not getting the job is never a personal reflection on you, it just means that the employer found

somebody more suited to the position. Use your unsuccessful applications as learning experiences to improve your job research skills and take the reasons given by employers seriously. This will help you to be more competitive for the next vacancy.

Look for symbols on adverts, e.g. Mindful Employer or the Two Ticks symbol. These mean that the employer has signed up to promoting a non-discriminatory and supportive attitude to applicants and employees with disabilities and health needs.



Employer requirements

Employers have legal responsibilities to provide a safe workplace for everyone - staff, customers and visitors. Health information may be legally required by your employer so that they can keep providing a safe workplace. If you have a work restriction due to a health condition, or to side effects of medication, you can be required to tell your employer about this. For instance, sometimes medication prevents safe driving. If driving is part of your job, and your medical practitioner has recently advised you not to drive, or you feel you can no longer drive safely, you will need to tell your employer for safety reasons. In addition, some employers require you to have a medical examination or a criminal records bureau (CRB) check after you have been offered a job.



Once you are working

- **Managing personal information in the workplace**
- **Planning a strategy in case you become unwell**
- **Managing stress and symptoms in the workplace**
- **Communicating with others at work**
- **How family members can help**



Managing personal information in the workplace

Everyone has to manage sensitive and personal information about themselves when applying for jobs and when talking to others in the workplace. Many types of personal information can spoil our identity and our perceived suitability for a particular job. For instance it was not long ago that being unmarried, female, over 40 years, or of a minority religious or cultural background, were considered major barriers to getting employment. Today disabilities, HIV status, mental health conditions, and criminal record history are the most likely to trigger stigma and unfair discrimination. The employment specialist will work out a strategy with you to best manage your sensitive personal information to avoid unfair discrimination. Some of the things to consider are outlined below.

- Whether you have any visible signs of health conditions that will need to be explained to prevent unfair discrimination.
- Whether you need to refer to previous health conditions to explain lack of relevant experience or gaps in your work history.
- Whether the employment service is well known to the employer and any implications of this for managing your personal information.

- Whether you have any health conditions that cause work restrictions, or cause a need for reasonable adjustments at times, in the workplace. If so, it is important to identify and discuss these work restrictions in work performance terms, while not using medical or psychiatric terms that employers may not understand. If the employer asks for more medical or psychiatric information, make sure this is also explained so as not to increase the chances of unfair discrimination.

Within legal and ethical limits, it is your personal choice as to how you tell your employer about your relevant personal information. Most employment specialists are usually well trained in this aspect, and they can help you to identify the precise terms and descriptions that will not discourage employers, that will emphasise your strengths and enable you to access workplace adjustments when needed. Your employment specialist will document a plan for managing personal information in the workplace.

Sometimes due to negative previous experiences, people choose to avoid any form of disclosure as their main strategy. This preference can limit the assistance you can receive. For instance, it may no longer be possible for the employment specialist to contact employers on your behalf. If you suddenly become unwell when working, this could mean the end of your job if you are unable to explain the sudden need for sickness absence, or you are unable to ask for reasonable adjustments because no health reasons can be provided.

A solution to these difficulties can be found by discussing this issue in more detail with an employment specialist, and then by choosing the best words to describe how the health condition impacts on your work routine. Sometimes this is as simple as saying 'I sometimes get unwell and need to have time off without pay'. Providing no warning or explanation to employers is unlikely to be a helpful strategy in the longer term, even if it helps you to feel safe from stigma in the short term.

Managing our own privacy and our own personal information in the workplace is very important to all of us. For someone with a mental health condition, it is not a simple decision to disclose psychiatric information or not. An open and thoughtful discussion with an employment specialist can help achieve the best balance between the need for appropriate disclosure and your need for privacy. Further details about managing personal information, along with ethical and legal implications, can be found in the Waghorn and Lewis (2010) reference at the end of this booklet.

I always disclose my mental health need as employers are more understanding when I need to take time off when I am unwell or to attend medical appointments. Most of all it reduces the stigma associated with having a mental illness when employers and co-workers can see that I am doing a good job.

Juliette

Planning a strategy in case you become unwell

The Wellness Recovery Action Program (WRAP) is a structured system for helping people with a mental health condition to monitor uncomfortable and distressing symptoms. Through planning responses to these situations, people report being able to reduce, modify or eliminate some of these symptoms and the distress associated with them.

Part ①: **is a daily maintenance plan.**

In this section you are asked to describe how you feel when you feel well. You are also asked to list everything you need to do every day to maintain your wellness. Then you are asked to list the things you might need to consider doing that day.

Part ②: **deals with triggers.**

Here you identify those events or situations which, if they occur, might cause unpleasant symptoms. You are asked to plan what to do if any of these triggers occur.

Part ③: **deals with early warning signs.**

Here you are asked to identify those subtle signs that may indicate the situation is beginning to worsen. You are then asked to plan what to do when any of these warning signs are noticed.

Part ④: **deals with symptoms that occur.**

When the situation has become much worse but has not yet reached a crisis. You are asked to plan what to do if any of these symptoms occur.

Part ⑤: **is the crisis plan.**

This is when you can no longer make reliable decisions, take care of yourself and keep yourself safe. It is for use by your supporter network on your behalf as the person who developed the plan.

Part ⑥: **is the post crisis planning.**

It is different from other sections of the WRAP in that it is constantly changing as you begin to feel better.

More information about the WRAP and help in using this system is available at:



www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk

Managing stress and symptoms in the workplace

If you have not worked for a long time, you are likely to feel tired physically and mentally soon after starting work. You can manage this by planning each working week with good meals, preparing clean, ironed clothes in advance, and by getting more sleep during the week. Sometimes people need to reduce other commitments through the week as they will probably make it harder to get through work the next day.

Once you start work it is important to regularly discuss your energy and fatigue balance with your care co-ordinator and with the employment specialist. You will not enjoy the job if you are working more hours than you can sustain in the long term. Remember, employment is a marathon not a sprint race.



Another thing that all workers can do is to plan their days off and plan their annual leave soon after starting in a new job. Talk to your supervisor about this first so that you can use planned leave, rather than unplanned sick leave, to prevent fatigue and accumulating work stress. It is also important to find out when your supervisor prefers you to take leave so that you can make leave arrangements that suit both you and your employer.

Stress can be a factor in the onset or worsening of symptoms. Everyone has stress in their lives from time to time. It is important to have strategies to help you manage your work if you are feeling stressed. Some approaches are outlined below.

- Take a short break or shift to a less challenging task.
- Take some long slow breaths to slow your breathing.
- Talk to a trusted colleague or call a friend after work.
- Check the accuracy of your negative thoughts.
- Talk to an employment specialist or to a health professional.



- Take time out and arrange to make up the work time later.
- Do some physical exercise, such as going for a walk later that day.
- Keep a written record of what was happening when you felt stressed.



- Eat healthy food and reduce the amount of junk food in your diet.
- Try to get more sleep at night.
- Try and do something nice for yourself each day.
- Identify any unsolved problems that may be worrying you.

For more help with managing stress and for managing symptoms, you can ask your care co-ordinator.

Working can be stressful so I need to manage this by ensuring I get enough sleep, eat healthy meals, get some exercise and lead a balanced life.

Marty

It can be really tiring when you first start work but it's not because of your illness, it's because you aren't used to working. This is normal and it gets easier as your body gets used to it.

Milly

I was worried that my mental health condition would be really noticeable to my co-workers and that they would treat me differently, but this has not been the case. My co-workers have been helpful and supportive and my employment has turned out better than I thought.

Ian

Communicating with others at work

Communicating clearly with others in the workplace can be challenging. It is important that you are positive in your interactions with others and that you also speak positively about yourself. Communicating well with others begins with sensible self-talk.

Here are some tips on how to communicate clearly to yourself.

- **Say only accurate and positive things to yourself** and about yourself. This is necessary because when we feel stressed we often fail to notice positive things and can be overly critical of ourselves.
- **Give yourself credit for the things that you do well** and try to notice whenever you learn something new.
- **Treat yourself with respect**, at least as much respect as you show to others.
- **Forgive yourself for your mistakes**, and then try something new to prevent this mistake happening again. Detecting and managing our own mistakes is important for being successful at work.

Some tips for when you talk to others

- Be polite; treat everyone with respect and as an equal.
- Look at people casually (not intensely) in the eyes when speaking to them.
- Use 'I' statements whenever possible.
- If someone is giving you instructions, ask if you can check with them that you understand what they are talking about.
- Offer to show them if they seem unclear about what you are saying.
- Be assertive when needed, such as when declining overtime or declining a shift change. Being assertive can simply mean saying no politely and giving a valid reason.
- Don't get involved in gossip about others in the workplace.
- Always speak to others in a friendly positive way, just as you would like to be spoken to by others.
- Be willing to take responsibility when things go wrong.

Good listening tips

- Give the speaker your full attention.
- Just listen, and try not to think about what you want to say next.
- Try not to give advice unless you are specifically asked.
- Don't interrupt while the speaker is talking, it does not usually matter how long you wait to reply.
- If someone is giving you instructions, don't pretend to understand if you are not sure. You can ask to be shown, or ask if you can write the instructions down. You can also ask to come back later to check that you are following the instructions correctly.
- Pay attention to signs of the speaker's feelings. This will help you understand the urgency and importance of the communication.
- If you are not quite sure how to respond, you can sometimes say you will think about it for discussion later. If you use this option, you may need to give a time by when you will be ready to respond.



How family members can help

Adults with a mental health need who live with their family report positive and negative experiences.

The good points are listed below.

- Family members usually want to help you.
- Housing can be more affordable.
- Family members can assist with things like transport and keeping appointments with health professionals.
- In a family home there is usually more assistance with cooking, cleaning, shopping.

Some of the negative experiences reported are listed here.

- You may have less freedom to come and go.
- The family may have strict rules and expectations for your behaviour.
- The family may be worried about anything you do that is outside of the usual routine - this is understandable because families are usually disrupted when a family member becomes acutely unwell with a mental health condition.

Family members can help you in lots of ways. They can encourage and support you to take reasonable risks in seeking employment and assist you to identify your vocational goals.

Family members can help you in lots of ways. They can encourage and support you to take reasonable risks in seeking employment and assist you to identify your vocational goals. They can also talk about your strengths and natural abilities when choosing possible jobs you might like to try. Once you are working, the family can help you get organised for

work, by helping you to organise transport, medication, meals at work and clean work clothing.

Family support groups

Family support groups can sometimes provide suitable support and education for the family. These types of programs can provide information to families about the nature of the illness, expectations of the person at home, setting limits to help manage the illness, problem-solving training, information about the latest treatments, information about other assistance in the community, and information about relapse prevention and early detection. This type of education programme can reduce the burden on the family and can help both families and the person who is commencing employment.

Contacts

- **England-wide services**
- **Jobcentre Plus Disability Employment Advisors**
- **Other local employment services**
- **Other useful resources**
- **How to find out more about the research evidence**



England-wide services

Jobcentre Plus

This site provides information about a range of services and supports available to job seekers or employees.

Direct gov provides details on how to access these services if you need them.



www.direct.gov.uk

Business Link

This site provides practical business advice and support including information on self employment.



www.businesslink.gov.uk

Volunteering England & Community Service Volunteer

This site provides assistance to find a volunteer position.



www.CSV.org.uk

www.volunteering@volunteering.org.uk

Local Disability Employment Advisors

Please use the following table to record the details of your local Disability Employment Advisors and Jobcentre Plus contacts.

Name:	
Address:	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Phone:	<hr/>
Email:	<hr/>
Website:	<hr/> <hr/>

Name:	
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Website: _____

Other local employment services

Please use the table below to record the details of your local Employment Support providers.

Name:	_____
Address:	_____

Phone:	_____
Email:	_____
Website:	_____

Name:	_____
Address:	_____

Phone:	_____
Email:	_____
Website:	_____

Name:	_____
Address:	_____

Phone:	_____
Email:	_____
Website:	_____

Care Co-ordinator information

Please use the table below to record the details of your care co-ordinator.

Name:	_____
Address:	_____

Phone:	_____
Email:	_____
Website:	_____

Name:	_____
Address:	_____

Phone:	_____
Email:	_____
Website:	_____

Name:	_____
Address:	_____

Phone:	_____
Email:	_____
Website:	_____

Other useful resources

Centre for Mental Health

This site provides information and advice on developing and promoting new ways of helping people with mental health needs get and keep work.



www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk

Name: _____
 Address: _____

 Phone: _____
 Email: _____
 Website: _____

Name: _____
 Address: _____

 Phone: _____
 Email: _____
 Website: _____

Name: _____
 Address: _____

 Phone: _____
 Email: _____
 Website: _____

How to find out more about the research evidence for supported employment

Throughout this booklet we have mentioned when there is evidence for a particular statement we have made. If you are interested, you might like to read the following articles and books. Your local library can assist you to find these items.

Bond, G.R. (2004). Supported Employment: evidence for an evidence-based practice. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*, Volume 27, Number 4, 345-359.

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Burns, T., Catty, J., Becker, T., Drake, R., Fioritti, A., Knapp, M., Lauber, C., Rossler, W., Tomov, T., van Busschbach, J., White, S., & Wiersma, D. (2007). The effectiveness of supported employment for people with severe mental illness: a randomised controlled trial. *The Lancet*, 370, 1146-1152.

King, J., Cleary, C., Harris, M.G., Lloyd, C., & Waghorn, G. (in press). The employment-related information needs of Australian mental health service clients and clinicians. *Work: A Journal of Prevention, Assessment & Rehabilitation*.

National Social Inclusion Programme, NIMHE, CSIP. (2006). Vocational services for people with severe mental health problems: Commissioning guidance. London: CSIP for Department of Work and Pensions and Department of Health.

Rinaldi, M., Miller, L., Perkins, R. (2010) Implementing the individual placement and support (IPS) approach for people with mental health conditions in England. *International Review of Psychiatry* 22. 163-172.

Schneider, J., Boyce, M., Johnson, R., Secker, J., Grove, B., Floyd, M. (2009) Impact of supported employment on service costs and income of people with mental health problems. *Journal of Mental Health*, 18(6), 533-542.

Schneider, J., Slade, J., Secker, J., Rinaldi, M., Boyce, M., Johnson, R., Floyd, M., Grove, B. (2009) SESAMI study of employment support for people with severe mental health problems: 12-month outcomes. *Health and Social Care in the Community* 17(2), 151-158.

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Waghorn, G., and Lloyd, C. (2010). Employment and people with mental illness. Ch 1 in *Vocational rehabilitation and mental health*. C. Lloyd (ed). New York: John Wiley and Sons.

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Notes:

Notes:

Disclaimer: This booklet was developed in March 2011 for use in England. The editors have checked the accuracy of all information in this booklet at the time of writing. However, government policy and website information in particular, can change quickly over time. For instance, employment services are currently being reviewed by the UK Government. We therefore recommend that this booklet be viewed as a brief introduction to the information available on this topic. We also recommend the websites cited are accessed directly for the most current information available. For these reasons, we cannot accept any responsibility for information that has become obsolete.

This booklet is not intended to replace professional care from a qualified mental health professional, and is not intended to replace the professional advice available from an experienced employment specialist.

Suggested citation: Wodke, E., Schneider, J., Blake, M., Waghorn, G. *Building a Career of Your Choice*. UK Edition. Published May 2011. Nottingham: CLAHRC-NDL.



The Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care – Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire and Lincolnshire (CLAHRC-NDL) is a partnership between the University of Nottingham and NHS organisations across the region. It is one of nine CLAHRCs in England, and is funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR).

CLAHRC-NDL undertakes high quality, applied, health and social care research and translates that research into practice; improving services for patients and service users across the East Midlands and beyond.

Its current clinical research themes include Mental Health, Children & Young People, Primary Care and Stroke Rehabilitation. There are currently four research studies within the Mental Health Theme, helping people with a mental health condition in the following areas:

- Employment support
- Chronic mood disorder
- Readiness for treatment in personality disorder
- Dental and physical health needs



www.clahrc-ndl.nihr.ac.uk

