



work support
self-efficacy
confidence access
earnings quick rebuild

In-House Hiring Resource
Prepared by CSH
For
The Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services

Background

Supportive Housing is foundational in the improvement of the health and wellness of its residents. Research has consistently demonstrated that residents of supportive housing have less frequent hospitalizations and incarcerations, and improved housing stability. The state of Ohio has also invested in Recovery Housing, which provides an alcohol and drug-free living environment, peer support, and connection to recovery assistance for people with substance use disorders. In both cases, housing stabilization is the first step on the path toward greater self-determination. Increased income and earnings are a key second step that too often is difficult for housing providers to promote but for which a growing set of research and best-practice examples are emerging.

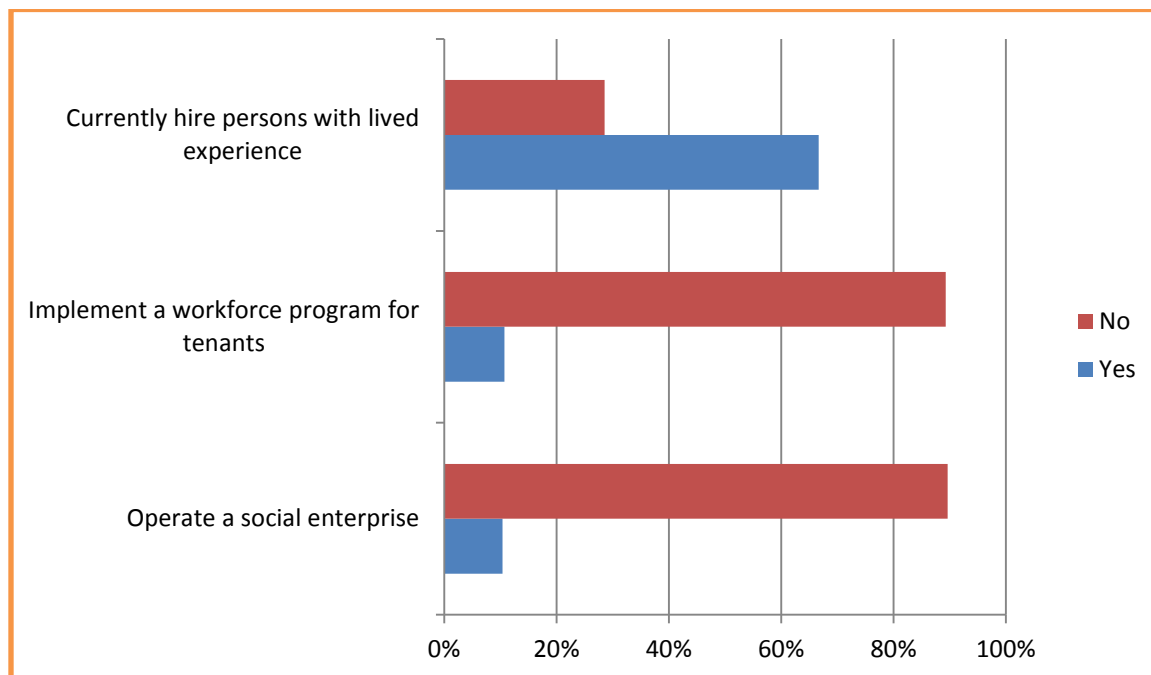
In-house hiring, or hiring persons with lived experience to work within supportive housing and recovery housing, can be an effective strategy to support employment of residents. In-house hiring can provide a long-term job for unemployed residents or it can be used to bridge the gap between unemployment and competitive employment in the community for persons with behavioral health challenges. Quick access to jobs has been identified as a key evidence-based practice through both Supported Employment and Transitional Jobs. It has further been demonstrated that obtaining and maintaining work is not a result of treatment, but rather an integral part of treatment and recovery.

In-house hiring can be achieved at minimal cost to the housing provider, in that the wages are sunk costs, already budgeted by the organization. Hiring in-house is also attractive since the residents' skills and employment barriers are known in advance and supervision and on-the-job training and supports can be tailored accordingly. Mission-oriented housing providers appreciate the opportunity to promote residents' or former residents' goals for increased earnings and greater self-efficacy. There are, however, numerous important considerations that should be factored into an organization's decision to launch or expand an in-house employment strategy.

Ohio Housing Partners Hiring Practices

In March 2015, housing partners of the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (Ohio/MHAS) were surveyed to determine the frequency with which providers hire persons with lived experience and current or former tenants of supportive housing and recovery residences. Forty-two individuals representing housing and service providers responded. The respondents indicated most organizations hire persons with lived experience, but few have a specific workforce initiative for tenants. These responses are illustrated in Chart 1.

Chart 1: Ohio Housing and Service Providers Workforce Practices



Innovation Lab and Opportunities for New Approaches

In order to learn more from housing partners and tenants of supportive housing and recovery residences, an Innovation Lab, which is a creativity-driven, collaborative approach to solving complex problems, was held in Columbus on April 20, 2015. There were 16 participants, including four supportive housing residents. Participants came from large and small communities throughout Ohio. The participants discussed challenges and opportunities related to in-house employment strategies, then divided into four teams and developed in-house employment models and technical assistance tools necessary to launch the proposed initiatives.

Three of the four teams focused on peer support and peer recovery positions that could enhance service delivery within housing programs. In one model, the team members identified a strategy to offer entry-level peer support positions that introduce new residents to the housing program and assist in troubleshooting or connecting the tenants to opportunities available through the program. After a period of experience and participation in training, the peer support specialists would intervene to work with clients in crisis, provide resources to residents to assist with their stated needs, and ensure regular community meetings at the building.

Another team identified a social enterprise opportunity based in a retail store. Positions created through the social enterprise would assist tenants in gaining skills in retail, transportation/logistics, warehouse, and customer service fields.

The primary barriers to working in-house expressed by residents and direct service staff centered on potential loss of benefits associated with reentering the workforce. They also expressed that residents had trouble visualizing or breaking down steps on the path back to employment from chronic homelessness – “it just seemed too daunting” to some. In many cases, residents had struggled for years to secure housing and benefits that they feared would be jeopardized if they returned to work.

Innovation Lab participants identified key opportunities to combat barriers:

- Access to individualized benefit counseling for residents;
- Peer support among those re-entering the workforce;
- Ongoing support or coaching after re-attaching to the workforce.

To incentivize housing programs to initiate in-house employment programs, participants recommended that sample program models, job descriptions, and funding strategies be made available to housing providers and mental health boards throughout the state. They indicated partnerships could and should be developed among OhioMHAS/local boards, housing providers, workforce organizations, and private sector partners. Finally, more learning opportunities that are face-to-face and web-based were requested and encouraged.

Research/Best Practice Review

There is ample research available on the importance of promoting employment opportunities for supportive housing residents and on the strength of incorporating peers into the workforce. (Burt 2012, HUD 2013, Frost 2011). Additionally, lessons learned from In-House Employment efforts both inside and outside of Ohio offer important insight into this topic.

From the late 1990s through 2011, CSH worked with non-profits across the country on two initiatives known as Next Steps: Jobs and Allies for Employment. Next Steps: Jobs was a partnership in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco to enhance employment strategies among 20 supportive housing programs. The multi-year initiative funded by The Rockefeller Foundation resulted in 1,000 residents accessing employment including many who were employed within supportive housing programs. Next Steps led to the creation of a curriculum to establish a property management career ladder offered through Wilbur Wright Community College. A subsequent initiative, Allies for Employment, sought to build on these findings by providing seed funding to develop connections between supportive housing and mainstream workforce services as well as private sector employers. One of the Allies for Employment sites was in Dayton, Ohio. Miami Valley Housing Opportunities (MVHO) received seed funding to create an operations plan for a Specialized Employment Center designed to serve individuals with homeless histories and significant barriers to employments. In creating the plan, MVHO crafted a partnership with the local workforce investment system, Goodwill Easter Seals and the Continuum of Care entity, Homeless Solutions. The product of the grant included position descriptions, organization and program handbooks, as well as partnerships necessary to launch the employment center. Ultimately, the project was unable to secure long-term operations funding and has not been fully realized to date. (CSH 2009)

Successful program leaders and supportive housing employment experts have highlighted the importance of connecting with mainstream workforce systems. There are a number of published materials from CSH and Heartland Alliance's National Center on Homelessness and Employment that provide helpful guidance on this topic. In particular, CSH's 2008 work with Advocates for Human Potential and the Office of Disability Employment within the US Department of Labor resulted in "Ending Chronic Homelessness through Employment: A Program and Policy Handbook to Successfully Linking Supportive Housing and Employment Services for Chronically Homeless Adults." (http://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Report_CHETA_ProgramPolicy_Handbook.pdf) Materials from the National Center on Homelessness and Employment can be found on their website at <http://www.heartlandalliance.org/nationalinitiatives/our-initiatives/national-center-on-employment.html>

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) produced summary material and an audio lecture series on effective employment strategies for persons experiencing homelessness. The HUD series explores job attachment and retention strategies as well as the integration of common supportive housing practices such as Motivational Interviewing and peer supports. https://www.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/AudioLecture7_Pamphlet.pdf

The two most frequently cited evidence-based practices related to In-House employment are Supported Employment/Individualized Placement Support (SE/IPS), and Transitional Jobs. (Bond 2004, Becker 2003, Drake 1998.) The state of Ohio, through its Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, as well as a pending state plan amendment proposed by the Department of Medicaid, has made a significant investment in SE/IPS.

SE/IPS and Transitional Jobs are two of the sample program model approaches included in this web-based resource tool.

Summary Findings/Recommendations

Based on interviews with housing program leaders and residents, as well as a review of relevant research and best practice programs, the following eight core principles have been identified as predictors of success in hiring in house:

- 1. Capitalize on motivation – act when someone says they want to work.**
- 2. Stay in your core area of strength. Don't stretch your organization to develop new programs or work activities that don't suit your strengths or organization's mission.**
- 3. Treat residents like regular employees with the same rights and responsibilities. Lived experience should be invisible unless and until the employee self-identifies or chooses to share their life experience.**
- 4. Jobs should offer time off or flexible schedules to enable participation in counseling and medical appointments. Supporting continuing recovery and wellness will improve long-term success.**
- 5. Offer benefits counseling. How to help your residents avoid falling over the benefits cliff without a safety net.**
- 6. Foster peer support among those re-entering the workforce. Peers have a lot to offer from practical tips to encouragement – use this “free” resource effectively.**
- 7. Don't live where you work. There are many common boundaries and conflicts of interest that may arise when a tenant works in his or her residence. It is best to avoid these conflicts by promoting employment opportunities outside their specific residence.**
- 8. Provide ongoing support/job coaching. The first placement for those re-entering the workforce is often challenging and intensive supports should be available as needed. These can often be available through local mental health agencies.**

More generalized “lessons learned” from discussions with practitioners include an understanding that employment focused efforts in housing programs typically occur in fits and spurts. Funding for these efforts may rely on time-limited grants and with limited resources, an organization's focus may shift onto other priorities due to external pressures. However, there is broad support for creating earning opportunities for the residents of housing programs using the resources to fund the housing programs.

In-House Employment Resource Components

CSH's web-based toolkit includes the following materials designed to help housing and service providers develop or enhance their in-house hiring practices:

1. [Vocationalizing Supportive Housing](#): An overview document as well as a self-assessment tool are provided to help housing and service providers review their strengths and identify opportunities to improve an employment-focused housing culture.
2. [Sample Program Models](#): A review of various approaches to In House Hiring that are operating in Ohio and elsewhere. This document includes a brief overview of funding approaches, program examples, job descriptions (where applicable), and practice tips.
3. [Supported Employment](#): A landing page to link to more information, free evidence-based practice toolkits, and statewide training opportunities to help implement this model.
4. [Mainstream Workforce Resources](#): A PowerPoint with summary information and resource linkages exploring opportunities for housing and service providers to partner and share resources with mainstream workforce service providers. Additionally, a Practice Tip sheet for what you can do to engage your local workforce system is provided.
5. [Understanding the Impact of Earnings on Benefits](#): A paper exploring the commonly held myths about combining work and public benefits as well as linkage to a wealth of resource materials and state experts to help residents navigate the complex rules and regulations through the Social Security Administration.
6. [A brief video](#) highlighting an employee/former tenant and a supervisor in a supportive housing setting.
7. [Practical Considerations](#): A paper that reviews common barriers to employment, ethics and boundaries, supervision tips, partnership with job coaches, and recovery-related workplace challenges.
8. [Advocacy](#): A PowerPoint with embedded videos and tools highlighting the opportunities for promoting tenants to become advocates.
9. [Peer Support Certification](#): A landing page to connect to peer support training and certification, as well as free skill inventory and career readiness assessments.
10. [Tenant Outreach and Engagement](#): A PowerPoint exploring how to identify, recruit, and support tenants as they transition to the workforce.
11. [Barrier Busters](#): A tip sheet for common, tangible barriers to tenants entering the workforce.

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