



A literature review on this topic revealed the following practices to be evidence based and effective. The intention of this review is to substantiate best practices in Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Programs (HVRP) with research findings in the professional workforce development literature, such as they exist and are relevant to the HVRP population. Where research is limited or not directly about veterans or homeless populations, inferences were made to inform HVRP practices.



**WHAT
WORKS?**

Research at
Your Fingertips

HELPING VETERANS TRANSITION TO JOBS AND KEEP THEM: THE EVIDENCE

The research on employment services for people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, and/or veterans tends to focus on preparing people for employment, developing jobs, and assisting people in the search for competitive employment. There is a smaller body of research that looks at the issues involved in transitioning individuals into employment and on factors that help people retain employment over time. Relatively little in this literature is specific to veterans experiencing homelessness; however, the available research that looks at a broader but related population (including people experiencing homelessness, veterans who are not homeless, and non-veterans with psychiatric and other disabilities) offers useful findings that may be applied to veterans experiencing homelessness.

Transitioning to Employment

Employers need information about the benefits of hiring veterans and accommodations for disabled veterans. Although many companies say they want to hire veterans, most only make an effort to do so if there is a financial incentive or other business-related motivation (Harrell & Berglass, 2012). Rudstam and colleagues (2012) surveyed more than 1,000 human resource professionals, looking at their knowledge, beliefs, willingness to hire, and actual hiring practices related to veterans with disabilities. They found that employers were willing to consider hiring recently separated veterans with disabling conditions, but that they had significant knowledge gaps about requirements for reasonable accommodations and disability-related disclosure issues. This information gap was particularly acute for issues regarding workers with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI). Employers mistakenly believed that employing veterans with disabilities would involve more costs and more of a manager's time, and were unsure whether workers diagnosed with PTSD were more likely than others to be violent in the workplace. Employment specialists should

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take the initiative to educate employers about these issues and inform them about specific challenges faced by each veteran, to the extent that the veteran consents to disclosing such information to potential employers.

Supported Employment can be an effective approach for veterans experiencing homelessness.

Supported Employment is an approach to vocational rehabilitation for people with disabilities and/or socially disabling conditions that assists individuals in finding, getting, and keeping competitive work in the community, and providing support to help them succeed in the workplace. Also known as Individual Placement and Support (IPS), Supported Employment is based on the philosophy that every person is capable of working competitively in the community if the right kind of job and work environment can be found (Campbell, Bond & Drake, 2011). Individuals are offered help finding and keeping jobs that build on their personal strengths and motivation. Supported employment de-emphasizes prevocational assessment and training and puts a premium on rapid job search and attainment. The job search is conducted at a pace that is comfortable for the person served and is not slowed down by programming prerequisites. Supported Employment is based on the understanding that many people benefit from long-term support after getting a job; thus, these programs do not impose unrealistic time limitations on services, although they focus on helping individuals become as independent as possible (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services, 2009). Although a recent review of the literature related to homeless veteran reintegration did not find any research studies that directly focused on Supported Employment for veterans experiencing homelessness, research on other populations offers evidence that Supported Employment may also be a useful approach for this group (Woolsey & Naumann, 2015).

Supported Employment includes activities to help jobseekers find work, including rapid job placement, frequent employer contact, individualized job searches, developing relationships with a diverse group of employers, and making a good job match (Becker, Smith, Tanzman, Drake, & Tremblay, 2001). Supported Employment is a preferred intervention for veterans

with psychiatric or addition disorders (Rosenheck & Mares, 2007; Twamley, Baker, Norman, Pittman, Lohr & Resnick, 2013); veterans with PTSD (Davis, Leon, Toscano, Drebing, Ward, Parker, Kashner & Drake, 2012; Davis, Pilkington, Plodder, Blanket, Toscana & Parker, 2014); justice-involved veterans (LePage, Lewis, Washington, Crawford, Cipher, Davis & Glasgow, 2012); and veterans with spinal cord injuries (Sinnott, Joyce, Su, Ottomanelli, Goetz & Wagner, 2014; Ottomanelli, Barnett & Goetz, 2014). Leddy and colleagues (2014) found that veterans experiencing homelessness participating in Supported Employment fared better than their counterparts who were enrolled in Transitional Work Experience (TWE) programs, in terms of increased days worked, employment income, and decreased use of public benefits.

Veterans with lower educational attainment can benefit from Supported Employment initiatives.

Although research found that higher educational levels were associated with stronger work histories among veterans experiencing homelessness, veterans with more modest educational backgrounds are also employable and can benefit from targeted education and Supported Employment programs (Metraux, 2014). Metraux's findings suggest that veterans experiencing homelessness who are eligible for U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) education benefits can improve their long-term employment outcomes by continuing their education, preferably in combination with rapid rehousing assistance and vocational services. This recommendation includes veterans experiencing homelessness who are diagnosed with mental illness, as many are able to benefit from supportive work initiatives tailored specifically to homeless populations.

Veterans who lack positive attitudes toward work can benefit from employment initiatives.

Although one might assume that veterans with a positive attitude toward work would have better results in transitioning to employment, Mares and Rosencheck (2006) found that measures of attitudes only weakly predicted employment outcomes. This suggests that veterans transitioning to work *without* a favorable attitude should also be included in job development activities and not ruled out because of their attitude toward work.

Homeless veterans seeking employment may be disproportionately affected by a bad economy.

A study looking at unemployment rates for veterans experiencing homelessness with co-occurring disorders during a slowing economy found that this group was disproportionately affected by the 2007 recession (O'Connor, Kline, Sawh, Rodrigues, Fisher, Kane, Kuhn, Ellison & Smelson, 2013). The findings suggest a need for a more comprehensive approach and integrated vocational supports to help these individuals transition from joblessness to competitive employment.

Helping women veterans in rural areas transition to competitive employment requires a multi-faceted approach.

Women veterans in rural areas face a number of challenges finding employment, including geographic isolation, lack of transportation and childcare, and limited employment opportunities. An exploratory study found that addressing the employment needs of women veterans returning to rural environments requires a three-pronged approach that: 1) assesses the effectiveness of existing programs, using measures specific to rural women veterans; 2) adapts programs to better meet the needs of rural populations; and 3) forms new partnerships to engage and educate rural employers about the value that women veterans can bring to the workplace (Szelwach, Stinkogler, Badger & Muttukumaru, 2011).

It is also important to know what approaches are not effective. It is essential to understand what the research suggests is helpful in transitioning to employment, but it is equally important to understand what does not seem to work well. Studies show it is helpful for veterans with psychiatric and substance use issues to move into the labor market quickly, and that preparatory programs such as TWE may have value in helping veterans improve their job readiness and get quick access to income. However, without a robust job placement service, these TWE strategies have not been shown to be not effective at helping dually diagnosed veterans obtain competitive employment (Penk, Drebing, Rosenheck, Krebs, Van Ormer & Mueller, 2010).

Maintaining Employment

Providing job services to veterans with disabilities requires that employment professionals learn about military culture and the distinct employment needs of veterans.

VA employment services are thoroughly versed in the particular needs of veterans with disabilities; however, many veterans are served by state vocational rehabilitation agencies and/or local supported employment programs. A recent examination of current textbooks on vocational rehabilitation found they lack sufficient information about veterans' needs, so rehabilitation counselors and other employment professionals can benefit from training that explains military culture and helps prepare staff to focus on the distinct employment needs of veterans (Frain, Bishop & Bethel, 2010). The authors found that rehabilitation counselors' professional expertise is most beneficial in helping veterans maintain employment when it is supplemented by training about the very specific needs of disabled veterans.

Most jobs acquired through Supported Employment end due to the jobholder quitting, not through firing.

In a study of workers with psychiatric disabilities who participated in IPS, Cook & Burke-Miller (2015) found that most jobs ended because the employee quit, not because they were fired. Therefore, preventing voluntary job separations is crucial to successful job retention. This requires an understanding of what factors cause people to leave jobs. Among the findings were that people were more likely to quit jobs with which they were dissatisfied, low-wage jobs, jobs in which they worked fewer than 20 hours a week, and construction jobs. According to Cook and Burke-Miller, the following are the most vexing long-term job retention issues for people with psychiatric disabilities who participate in IPS:

- Fear of loss of benefits and entitlements and dealing with actual benefit reduction
- Financial education and planning
- Boredom with the job
- Dealing with illness exacerbations and learning to tell the difference between these and typical emotional reactions to workplace stressors

- Dealing with changes in boss and coworkers
- Social relations at work
- Recognizing the need for reasonable accommodations and negotiating their request and implementation
- Disclosure issues related to disability

Both explicit and implicit skills are crucial to job retention. Explicit skills are those specifically stated as required by the employer. These includes duties listed in the job description and other skills that a supervisor states are relevant to the job. Implicit skills (or soft skills) include the ability to fit in socially, to communicate well with coworkers and supervisors, and to appear confident while carrying out one's duties. These types of "soft skills" may be problematic for people with disabilities and those who have been out of the workforce for some time. Although these skills are vital to job retention, they are not usually specified by the employer, and people may require support in recognizing and practicing such skills (Boston University Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, 2015).

Disability-related employment accommodations can help increase job retention. In a review and synthesis of 20 years of research literature on this topic, MacDonald and colleagues (2011) found evidence suggesting the following:

- Employment tenure is positively associated with the number of job accommodations.
- Inadequate accommodation is associated with poorer outcomes, such as lower job satisfaction, lower sense of mastery and well-being, and a lack of opportunity for promotion.
- Job terminations may be related to unmet accommodation needs, such as flexible hours, more training, and improved supervision and support.
- Using clear, assertive communication about accommodation needs is associated with successful accommodation outcomes.

- The most common types of accommodations are:
 - Flexible hours and scheduling.
 - Providing access to a job coach or other human assistance, or support in the job.
 - Educating coworkers, extra support from coworkers or supervisors, and/or modified supervision or feedback from supervisors.
 - Adjusting the training length or learning process to acquire job task skills, including self-paced work.
 - Modifying job duties: restructuring the job, changing work assignments, or adjusting demands.

Professional support is important to job retention, but expanding jobholders' natural support systems may be even more crucial. Following the transition to competitive employment, ongoing support from employment professionals, such as job coaches, rehabilitation counselors, and employment specialists, plays a role in job retention (Boston University Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, 2015). These supports, which may be provided on or off the job site, involve face-to-face contact on a periodic basis. Bond and Kukla (2011) found that although it is not clear exactly what types of support services are most effective, frequency of contact between employment professionals and jobholders for 2 years after hiring is positively correlated with number of months of continued employment. Schutt and Hirsch (2009) found that professional support and natural supports were both correlated with success in retaining employment among people experiencing homelessness who had substance use and/or mental health problems.

Roberts and colleagues (2010) found there was a positive relationship between length of employment and the number of non-paid supporters in a person's network, and a negative relationship between the length of employment and the number of paid professional supporters involved in a person's work life. Murphy and colleagues (2005), noting that employment outcomes for IPS/Supported Employment are relatively modest, argue that the model has over-emphasized professional employment supports and has not paid

sufficient attention to the role that natural supports can provide in retaining employment. A natural supports approach involves enlisting supervisors and coworkers to assist the jobholder in developing the needed skills to survive and thrive on the job; this is the way most non-disabled people learn what is required of them in a new position, so this approach normalizes the employment of people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, and

other disadvantaged groups. It relies on feedback from others in the work environment and helps the jobholder become part of the existing social structure in the workplace, which enhances the ability to maintain employment. Mank and colleagues (1997) found that “individuals who are naturally supported are more apt to be better integrated and more stable in their jobs.”

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