The Pre-Vocational Handbook Contents

These materials were designed to be presented by non-vocational specialists trained by Institute for Health and Recovery Substance Abuse/Vocational staff. Descriptive materials, leader’s notes and hand-outs are included. Chapters may be used consecutively and completely for the most effective learning experience. Depending on the needs of the client(s), however, chapters may also be used independently of one another. Chapter descriptions follow. Games for Learning can be used in any order.

Introduction: Guidelines
Guidelines for implementation of the Handbook, as well as sample workshop series, are included in the introduction. Issues pertaining to work, treatment and recovery are also addressed.

Chapter 1: Life Skills
This chapter includes tools that will enable a woman to better care for herself by reviewing her lifestyle and equipping her to identify and manage stress. Affirming readings are included.

Chapter 2: Career Exploration
Work values and job preference exercises contribute to goals development and personal economic planning. Clients will need support going through the goals process, as there may be women who have not previously engaged in goal-setting. Labor market trends identify promising careers. Have fun with the games and visualizations, as they offer a non-threatening approach to career brainstorming.

Chapter 3: Customer Service
Customer service is a part of just about every job and goes beyond the retail setting. Basic concepts of good customer service are introduced. Games and exercises offer experiential opportunities for the group. If possible, give clients the chance to answer the telephone, take accurate messages and transfer calls in a professional manner.

Chapter 4: Internships, Mentoring and Shadowing
You can support community service as a learning experience by formalizing the expectations and evaluations of the workplace. Enclosed are sample documents for reference in turning unpaid work into material for a resume.

Chapter 5: Resume Building
Resume descriptions, transferable skills, worksheets, formats and samples are presented here. The “Poe” resume style is especially useful for those with poor work histories. “Job Retention Proofs” are so important that they are also included in the chapter on Interviewing and Job Retention. Clients determine their transferable skills and then give examples of when and where they used these skills in their resume.
Chapter 6: Interviewing
Suggestions for dealing with difficult questions about poor work and/or criminal justice histories are included here. Interviewing tips are offered that include professional presentation and formats for interviews. The format included answers an employer’s favorite question, “Why don’t you tell me a little about yourself…” Put those soft and hard skill proofs into action! Clients can practice interviewing as much as possible, using notes only as back-up.

Chapter 7: Job Search
Applications are addressed. Varieties of job search strategies are emphasized. The “Job Search Worksheet” is a great way to keep track of job leads and responses. Stress the importance of cover and follow-up letters. Play some games or schedule some stress-relievers into this job search time, which can be frustrating and demoralizing. Encourage people to practice their affirmations from the “Mentor” section of the handbook.

Chapter 8: Games for Learning
Games are all about playing, of course, but they are also about learning. They are based on the premise of “risk-taking education.” Like recovery, learning (and re-entering the workforce) implies a change that can result in excitement, increased hope, insecurity and frustration. One of the objectives of “adventure education” is to help participants deal with the process of risk and the product of behavioral change.

Chapter 9: Before the Job Starts
Some helpful hints on what to do between the “getting” of a job and the actual start of the job. Preparation for the realities and challenges of the world of work are good topics for this exciting but stressful time.

Chapter 10: Job Retention
Encourage the new worker to identify where, who, when and how she will maintain her support for her recovery in this crucial time of transition. Relapse prevention is a critical component of job retention. This chapter can be placed anywhere in this curriculum. It is never too early to practice keeping the job! It is the “soft” skills that will keep a worker in a job. Case studies and charades are available for some “real life” challenges that will face the new workers.

Chapter 11: Budgeting and Taxes
Tax strategies for low-income families can save women a significant amount of money. A paycheck sounds like a lot of money until it flies away too quickly. People often spend more money when their income increases, only to discover that they don’t have enough money to pay the bills. A preview of the net income will enable the new employee to create a budget – and keep those personal economic plan goals in mind! Consumer credit issues are also included in this chapter.

Chapter 12: Community Resources
Regional directories for child care, community action agencies, welfare to work programs and Career Centers are included in this section. Information is also provided about the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission.
Introduction to the Pre-Vocational Handbook
Institute for Health and Recovery

A Pre-Vocational Handbook was developed specifically to assist the gradual integration of work-related skills and tasks into the substance abuse treatment setting as clients prepare for eventual economic self-sufficiency. It presents a basic overview of concepts and tasks necessary for clients who are preparing to re-enter the world of work. Many materials were designed specifically for clients with poor work histories, though persons with significant work experience will also find useful resources herein.

These materials were also designed to be presented by non-vocational specialists. With training by Institute for Health and Recovery Vocational staff, substance abuse treatment providers will have the necessary information for facilitating the implementation of this handbook.

Work can provide a sense of well-being, self-esteem and security to persons at certain phases of treatment. Research from CASAWorks with Families of Columbia University reveals that “economic stability and full-time employment are among the primary factors associated with the successful rehabilitation of substance abusers.” In fact, “substance abuse treatment, employment, training and welfare to work theory and practice converge.” 1 All of these programs rely on structures and organizations that require “soft skills” such as dependability, problem-solving, perseverance, excellent attendance, initiative and the ability to follow directions.

There will be clients who, for various reasons, will not be able to work upon completion of treatment. Yet most clients will need to gain employment at some point in their recovery. Indeed, vocational and economic stability can be a strong element in relapse prevention. As accessibility of government-funded vocational training programs diminishes for women with school-age children, substance abuse treatment programs are recognizing the need to help prepare their clients for the world of work. Of necessity and in spite of time constraints, more and more substance abuse treatment programs are incorporating vocational counseling and resources into their programs.

This handbook will provide residential and outpatient substance abuse treatment providers with some of the tools necessary to help clients weave work and recovery into a life filled with hope and promise.

**Work and the Stigma of Substance Abuse**

“According to a national survey by the Hazelden Foundation, the majority of Americans say they accept alcoholism as a disease (79%); yet when presented with a practical situation, many people reveal a bias against the recovering alcoholic or addict. The telephone survey of 1,500 adults across the country found that if the respondents had to choose between two equally qualified job candidates – one who’s a recovering alcoholic and one who never needed treatment for alcoholism – almost half (47%) said they would hire the one who never needed treatment. When respondents were also asked to choose between two job candidates – one who’s a recovering drug addict and one who never needed treatment for drug addiction, 60% said they would hire the one who never needed treatment.”

1 This handbook is designed to be used in substance abuse treatment programs and includes materials that are directly relevant to persons in addictions treatment. Yet the handbook also contains a significant amount of material that is not specifically geared to persons in treatment, but is applicable to any jobseeker. It might be asked, then, “Why should substance abuse treatment professionals use a pre-vocational curriculum if every worksheet does not refer directly to substance abuse?”

Employment plays a critical role in helping women move away from addiction, poverty and abuse, but such a role is predicated on overcoming the stigma attached to addiction and treatment. What is true for recovering persons has been true for other populations over the years: they need to work harder to find employment and then work harder to prove that they can contribute to the well-being of the workplace.

This handbook is meant to help persons in addictions treatment to be as well-prepared as possible for re-entering the workplace. The better prepared they are on their resume and in their interview, the more they will impress the business community who still stigmatizes alcoholics and addicts. The better their life coping skills are, the better their job coping and job keeping skills will be.

The challenge is to educate the business community that hiring recovering persons can be a good business practice. Such persons have stopped using their addictive substances, embraced treatment programs, changed their lifestyles and are likely to show many of the job retention skills mentioned throughout this handbook. Since over 77% of illicit drug abusers are employed full-time, hiring persons who have been already been in treatment can be a safer business choice than general hiring. Recovering people do not need special privileges, they need fair and equal opportunities. Please note the following materials about the effects of treatment on the workplace.

The Effect of Treatment on the Workplace

Treatment is hope. Treatment works. Treatment is work. Work is treatment. Treatment and work keeps families together. Work and treatment help businesses thrive.

After 1 year in treatment:¹

- 75% less criminal activities
- 19% more employment
- 50% fewer medical visits
- 28% fewer mental health visits
- 42% less homelessness
- 34-56% less high risk social behavior

In a study in Massachusetts, employment rates after treatment rose 400%.²

In a study in Ohio, treatment affected the workplace by decreases in:³

- absenteeism by 89%
- tardiness by 92%
- on-the-job injuries by 57%

Earnings increase through treatment participation:

- In a study in Kansas, monthly earnings for those who complete training increased to 33% higher than earnings before treatment ⁴
- In a study in Washington State, AFDC clients completing intensive inpatient treatment were 64% more likely to have earned income than a comparison group ⁵

Substance Abuse decreases with treatment:⁶

After 5-16 months of treatment,

- illicit drug use decreased by about 50%
- alcohol abuse decreased by over 67%

Substance abuse treatment improves job training effectiveness.⁷

Employment helps moderate the occurrence and severity of relapse to addiction.⁸

¹ Presentation by George Gilbert of the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, (1999).
² Annual Report, Massachusetts Department of Public Health/Bureau of Substance Abuse Services (1999).
³ Cost Effectiveness System to Measure Drug Abuse and Alcohol Treatment Outcomes, Ohio Department of Alcohol & Drug Addiction Services, (1999).
⁴ Implementing Welfare Reform: Solutions to the Substance Abuse Problem, Child and Family Futures, (February, 1997).
⁵ The Impact of Substance Abuse Treatment on Employment Outcomes Among Assistance to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Technical Assistance Publication Series 25, Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration/Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (2001)
⁶ Final Report: Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, (1997).
Predicting Success on the Job

Succeeding on the job can mean various things: maintaining recovery, keeping a job, adequately completing job tasks, showing basic life skills management, having good attendance, obtaining benefits, wage increases and promotions as well as increased family stability. It can also mean “serial employment” or “job hopping,” leaving one job to obtain another. Maintaining employment may be a more realistic and practical goal than keeping one particular job for an extended period of time.

While success on the job is very difficult to project, there are tools that can be used to indicate a degree of likelihood that a person has the characteristics, commitment and experience to obtain and retain employment. Your clinical evaluation of the client’s recovery is an essential factor in determining probable success. Some tools that can contribute to the probability of client success on the job may be discovered by having a client complete the following worksheets. Further information about each category may be found in related chapters.

**Life Skills**

The more well-equipped a client is to handle job- and family- related challenges, changes and stressors, the greater the likelihood that she will succeed on the job. The following worksheets will provide the client with personal resources for stress-management.

- Lifestyle Survey
- Tolerance Survey
- Stress Management

**Reading and Math Skills**

There is no specific tool in this handbook to assess these grade levels. Generally, those people who have higher reading and math skills are more likely to obtain and retain employment than those with lower level skills. The local Career Center/Adult Basic Education professional can assess client educational levels. Persons with limited English should work on English as a second language as soon as possible to enhance their employability.

**Participation in Substance Abuse Treatment**

The more a client engages in treatment activities, including employment-related tasks, the likelier it is that she will more actively engage in employment activities.

**Games for Learning**

Participating in games can be uncomfortable or challenging to people. If a client can trust the game leader and risk doing something new, the chances are greater that a client can risk entering a new work situation.
**Resume Building:**
Persons with significant work history are more likely than those with poor work histories to obtain and retain employment. Pertinent information may be discovered using the following worksheets.

♦ **Vocational History:** reviewing number and duration of jobs, reasons for leaving job as well as attitudes toward supervisors will give you an idea of the client’s durability in the workplace. A suggested approach to a difficult job experience is, “What did you learn about yourself at that job? Is there something that you would do differently if you could?”

♦ **Job Retention Proofs:** does the client understand the need for excellent attendance, flexibility, etc.? Can the client give examples from this list with a leader’s help?

**Key factors linked to sustaining employment**
♦ Finding jobs at relatively high wages
♦ Working steadily, initially
♦ Using formal childcare arrangements

**Key factors linked to advancing to better jobs**
♦ Staying in a good job
♦ Changing jobs
♦ Find jobs at relatively high wages
♦ Working in certain occupations, i.e., not sales
♦ Developing basic skill levels and obtaining education beyond high school