

Competencies for Employment Specialists

Individual Placement & Support

People that experience mental health conditions want to work and like many others have a desire to live a meaningful and independent life. Despite this, employment outcomes remain inadequate with employment support systems often failing, resulting in diminished social and economic inclusion.

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is an evidence-based, supported employment model providing a means for individuals living with severe and persistent mental health conditions to seek and obtain competitive employment.

Your role as an employment specialist is crucial to assisting people to consider and pursue their employment opportunities. You are essentially connecting people to prospects so they may succeed in their chosen employment field or career.



In the table below are the key competencies that may enhance your performance as an employment specialist:

Being Efficient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Scheduling & time management. ✓ Flexibility and being able to re-prioritise, being prepared for unexpected circumstances. ✓ Being organised, planning for appointments or other employment related activities. ✓ Mapping out job development activities in advance and scheduling specific time to spend in the community. ✓ Carrying copies of business cards, marketing material and resumes for any opportunity to promote your service and suitable candidates. ✓ Debrief with the jobseeker about a prospective business or work environment, the operations and what it would mean to work there. ✓ Use your initiative and look for creative opportunities with employers and training providers – build relationships! ✓ Tracking your employer approaches – anticipate the week ahead, this helps you plan repeat visits to employers. ✓ Follow up immediately on missed appointments, re-booking an appointment and setting new job search tasks for the jobseeker.
Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Attitude, language and behaviour has an impact on your engagement with others – be respectful, be relatable, be positive! ✓ Encourage hope, optimism and self-belief. ✓ Work in partnership, create an equal relationship based on shared responsibility - personalised and collaborative relationships are critical to success. ✓ Ensure you honour the person's preferences and involve them with tasks and responsibilities; they are more likely to take ownership of the process and feel respected. ✓ Enable and encourage the jobseeker to be the primary lead in their employment journey. ✓ Take the person into the community and scope prospective opportunities together – let them explore and build confidence. ✓ Demonstrate enthusiasm to both the jobseeker and the prospective employers, highlight strengths. ✓ Build and maintain your networks and strive to get in front of the manager – secure a face-to-face & LISTEN to their needs before promoting your service. ✓ Clearly articulate and develop a Job Support Plan and discuss shared expectations of working together. ✓ Connect and work with your IPS supervisor on a weekly basis.
Collaboration with stakeholders & partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Be assertive and persistent without being rude. ✓ Ensure you are communicating effectively – use common language, ask questions and be prepared to listen.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Become inquisitive and learn about local businesses and training providers you approach. ✓ Access your vocational team members – share leads and opportunities, talk about the aspirations of jobseekers, their employment goals, and skills. Discuss engagement and job search challenges with your IPS supervisor. ✓ Be an ambassador of recovery through employment, share success stories and endorse people and their strengths. ✓ Inform the clinical team of successes, engage them outside of team meetings, ask questions and nurture ways to be a team player.
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What to avoid

Research studies (Glover & Frounfelker 2011) have identified that less successful employment specialists struggle with planning, preparation and organisation but most importantly, they espouse defeatist attitudes towards their role or associated tasks and fail to see the positive attributes, skills and strengths of those accessing the IPS employment program.

The following are identified as limiting factors in an employment specialist role:

- A negative or pessimistic outlook – believing there is no hope or opportunity for the individual based on historical or present circumstances;
- Determining that the person is in a hopeless situation or ‘broken’ and therefore not marketing them to prospective employers;
- Portraying the employment specialist role as “expert” and dominating the collaborative working relationship – being the dominant decision maker is ineffective as you dismiss the preferences and choices of the jobseeker;
- Lacking confidence and assertiveness – being fearful of approaching a prospective employer puts the employment success of the person in jeopardy; explore ways to improve your communication, interaction and marketing skills.

In summary

Individual Placement and Support is a recovery orientated approach; therefore a recovery orientated mindset is required to create a positive experience for the jobseeker.

Commit to regular IPS supervision, enrol in IPS training opportunities, take advantage of field mentoring. Be an active participant of the IPS steering committee giving reports, discussing celebrations and identifying challenges.

Have a good understanding of the IPS core principles:

1. **Competitive employment** is the primary goal
2. **Zero exclusion** – every individual who wants to find employment is eligible.
3. Job search is consistent with the **individual's preferences**.
4. **Rapid job search** – begins within one month.
5. Employment specialists are **integrated** with mental health services.
6. Employment specialists **develop relationships with employers** based upon a person's work preferences.
7. **Time unlimited and individualised support** is offered to both the employer and the program participant.
8. **Welfare benefits counselling** supports the person through the transition from benefit payments to salary and wages.

Become conversant with the [ANZ Supported Employment Fidelity Scale](#). Participate in any professional development activities that will enhance your practice and most importantly have fun and be creative!

This document was produced by Philleen Dickson (IPS WORKS) by extrapolating key findings from the following research articles:

Crystal M. Glover & Rochelle L. Frounfelker (2011): *Competencies of Employment Specialists for Effective Job Development*, American Journal of Psychiatric Rehabilitation, 14:3, 198-211.

Crystal M. Glover & Rochell L. Frounfelker (2013): *Competencies of More and Less Successful Employment Specialists*, Community Mental Health Journal 49:3, 311-316.