



Employment, Income Supports and Mental Illness

- ❖ There are approximately 3 million individuals of working age with psychiatric disabilities - 90 percent of these adults are unemployed—the lowest level of employment of any group of people with disabilities (SAMHSA, 2005; Department of Labor, 2005).
- ❖ Employment problems begin long before consumers with psychiatric disabilities try to enter the work force. Many individuals with serious mental illness lack the necessary high school and post-secondary education or training that is vital to build careers. A major study found that youth with emotional disturbance have the highest percentage of high school non-completion and failing grades compared with other disabled groups (President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health (February 2003).
- ❖ Nearly 70% of unemployed adults with severe mental illness want to work; 6 out of every 10 mentally ill consumers can work at a job in the community if they are provided with the right types of services and supports (SAMHSA, 2003).
- ❖ Psychiatric disability is the largest single diagnostic category among working-age persons receiving SSDI/SSI disability benefits (27%/36%) (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005).
- ❖ From 1988 to 2001, the total number of people receiving SSI rose more than two and one-half times, from about 1.7 million to 4.3 million. During the same period, the number of SSI recipients with mental disorders more than tripled (U.S. Department of Education, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, 2004).
- ❖ Approximately \$25 billion is spent annually in SSI and SSDI support payments for people with severe mental illness (NAMI, 2004).
- ❖ The nation's largest "program" for people with mental illness is disability payments (SAMHSA, 2005).
- ❖ Even with SSDI and SSI benefits, persons struggling with these disorders are among the lowest income households in the country (Technical Assistance Collaborative, 1999).
- ❖ Only half of 1% of SSI/SSDI recipients ever goes off these benefits (NAMI, 2004).
- ❖ For over a decade, SSI and SSDI beneficiaries with psychiatric disabilities have been increasing at rates higher than each program's overall growth rate (President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003).
- ❖ About 70% of individuals with psychiatric disabilities with college degrees earned less than \$10 per hour (President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003).
- ❖ Overall, in 2003 people with psychiatric disabilities earned a median wage of only about \$6 per hour (President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003).
- ❖ SSA income support costs could fall by as much as 20-40% by increasing the number of people with mental illness in the workforce (NAMI, 2004).
- ❖ The Individual Placement and Support program, in operation in more than 30 states has achieved an employment rate of 60-80 percent of people with psychiatric disabilities (Drake et al., 1999, NAMI, 2004).
- ❖ Approximately 70% of employers who are involved with supportive employment programs report that their employees with disabilities are excellent workers (NAMI, 2004).
- ❖ Studies of supported employment show that 60-80 percent of seriously mentally ill individuals obtain at least one competitive job, a success rate superior to traditional vocational programs (President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003).
- ❖ Most with serious mental illness are not receiving any vocational rehabilitation services at all. One large study found that only 23% of people with schizophrenia were receiving any kind of vocational services (President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, 2003).