

# **Education goals:** *A factsheet for providers*

Mental health providers have been described as being unsupportive of their client's educational goals and have little contact with personnel to coordinate supports to assist the student in meeting his or her educational objectives. However, this support is essential to consumers as up to 52% of mental health consumers would like more support in education such as assistance in applying to an education program, gaining access to financial aid, strengthening basic education skills, peer support groups, and staff

support. Students with disabilities are as academically successful as students without disabilities when person-specific supports are provided.

More than 33,000 students with mental illnesses are

enrolled in colleges and universities, a number that appears to be

people with psychiatric disabilities report that taking a class for leisure or life skills is important to them. Among

them, **64%** say they would like to do this more often.

**50%** of

63% of people with psychiatric disabilities report that going to school to earn a degree or certificate is important to them. Among them, 68% say they would like to do this more often.

increasing over time. In addition, many people with serious mental illness have a strong interest in obtaining higher education, which is important as education is a key factor in their employment.

Supported education programs provide support and services so people with a serious mental illness can begin or continue their postsecondary education. Half of students with serious mental illness who participated in a supported education program indicated that their job fit their education level and more than half indicated that

their education prepared them for their job.

#### **Barriers to education:**

Barriers to education vary between individuals, but are often internal barriers versus external barriers. It's important to work with consumers to identify what unique barriers they may experience and what supports they have to navigate those barriers.

- Issues with transportation
- Stigma
- Low self-esteem
- Health issues & hospitalization
- Lack of childcare
- Legal problems
- Lack of motivation, difficulty concentrating, trouble meeting deadlines

- Lack of money
- Poor social support
- Poor academic skills/performance
- Fear, anxiety, & stress
- Psychiatric symptoms & medication sideeffects
- Substance use problems
- Lack of institutional support (teachers,

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## Supports commonly used to reach educational goals:

- Financial support
   (scholarships, grants,
   financial counseling, etc.)
- Appropriate academic workload
- Classes/courses which are offered at ideal times of day
- Supportive teachers, professors, advisors and staff
- Help with admission, registration, finding programs
- Support from peers & family
- Developing academic skills
- Psychiatric stability
- Available accommodations
- Medication & physical wellbeing
- Childcare
- Legal help
- Substance use treatment

### **Supporting consumers pursuing education:**

An individualized support plan may be one of the most valuable ways to support consumers, particularly one which utilizes natural supports already available in their community.

The American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (<a href="www.aaace.org">www.aaace.org</a>) advocates for and disseminates research on adult education.

The library offers free or low-cost educational programs, including literacy classes, GED prep courses, English as a second language classes, and more in addition to books and educational media.

Community colleges generally offer a variety of adult education courses, including certificate courses and professional development workshops.

Many universities offer Continuing or Adult Education courses which are non-credit courses (not counting toward a college degree) and thus do not require application or admission to the university.

Within universities, the Office for Student Disability Services, the Dean of Students Office, and University Counseling Services provide resources and supports for students with psychiatric disabilities. Students who request accommodations obtain more than twice the number of supports as those who do not. However, current and former students receive a significant

amount of informal supports from instructors without going through disability offices.

The most helpful type of support for many students involves private meetings with instructors and other commonly used supports include providing extra time to complete assignments and exams and giving the student a grade of incomplete instead of a fail if a relapse occurs.

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