

## "Watch Your Steps" -Community Mental Health Professionals Perspectives on the Vocational Rehabilitation of People with Severe Mental Illness

Liv Grethe Kinn<sup>1</sup>, Marit Borg<sup>2</sup>, Helge Holgersen<sup>3</sup>, Larry Davidson<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Campus Bergen, Bergen, Hordaland, Norway, <sup>2</sup>Faculty of Health Sciences, Department of Nursing Science, Drammen, Norway, <sup>3</sup>Department of Clinical Psychology, University of Bergen, Bergen, Hordaland, Norway, <sup>4</sup>Program on Recovery and Community Health, School of Medicine, Yale University,, New Haven, Connecticut, USA

**Introduction:** There is a call to focus on clients' vocational recovery within community mental health services. Although the emerging body of research confirms the importance of the relationship between clients and professionals in clinical services, job support within these services has rarely been studied.

Thus, the **objective** of this qualitative study was to explore Norwegian mental health professionals' views of their clients' potential for working and their understanding of local vocational resources.

**Method:** Three focus groups with 21 participants; covering supported housing, activity centers and case management. 11 held Bachelor's degrees in social work and two in occupational therapy, and eight held a postgraduate degree in mental health nursing.

**Results:** Three main themes and one sub-theme emerged from the analysis: (1) Viewing clients as vulnerable and not ready for employment, subtheme (a) discovering their own lack of belief in their clients' vocational potential as a latent barrier; (2) practitioners laying stepping-stones to everyday life activities, from which clients could be launched into the community and meet new role responsibilities, and; (3) skepticism towards the competence of vocational rehabilitation staff.

**Conclusion:** Participants were at best ambivalent toward supporting their clients' vocational goals. These findings suggest that to facilitate work integration, mental health professionals should revise their knowledgebase related to guidance from recovery-oriented place-then-train models. Job specialists can be seen as necessary change agents, not only for clients' potential to find a job in the open labor market, but also for mental health professionals' attitudes toward the possibilities for their clients' work participation.