

# Expanding Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities

Presented by:  
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*Rebuilding Lives, Sharing Knowledge, Shaping Systems*

# Presentation Outline

- History of CUCS' Career Network
- Recovery-Based Outcome Oriented Services
- Decision to Adopt Supported Employment
- Implementing Supported Employment into Permanent Housing Sites
- Supported Employment Principles and Practice
- Changes as a Result of Integration
- Developing Employment Opportunities
- Financial Planning and Benefits Management
- Challenges/Lessons Learned

# Career Network 1994-2006

- 90% of program participants were non-residents of CUCS supportive housing
- Extensive intake
- Linear approach
- Program Participants were directed into specific career tracks
- Emphasis on classroom instruction and internships
- Job development discussed at end of internships
- Emphasis on preparing for work, not on working

# Agency-wide Shift to Recovery-Based, Evidence-Based Services

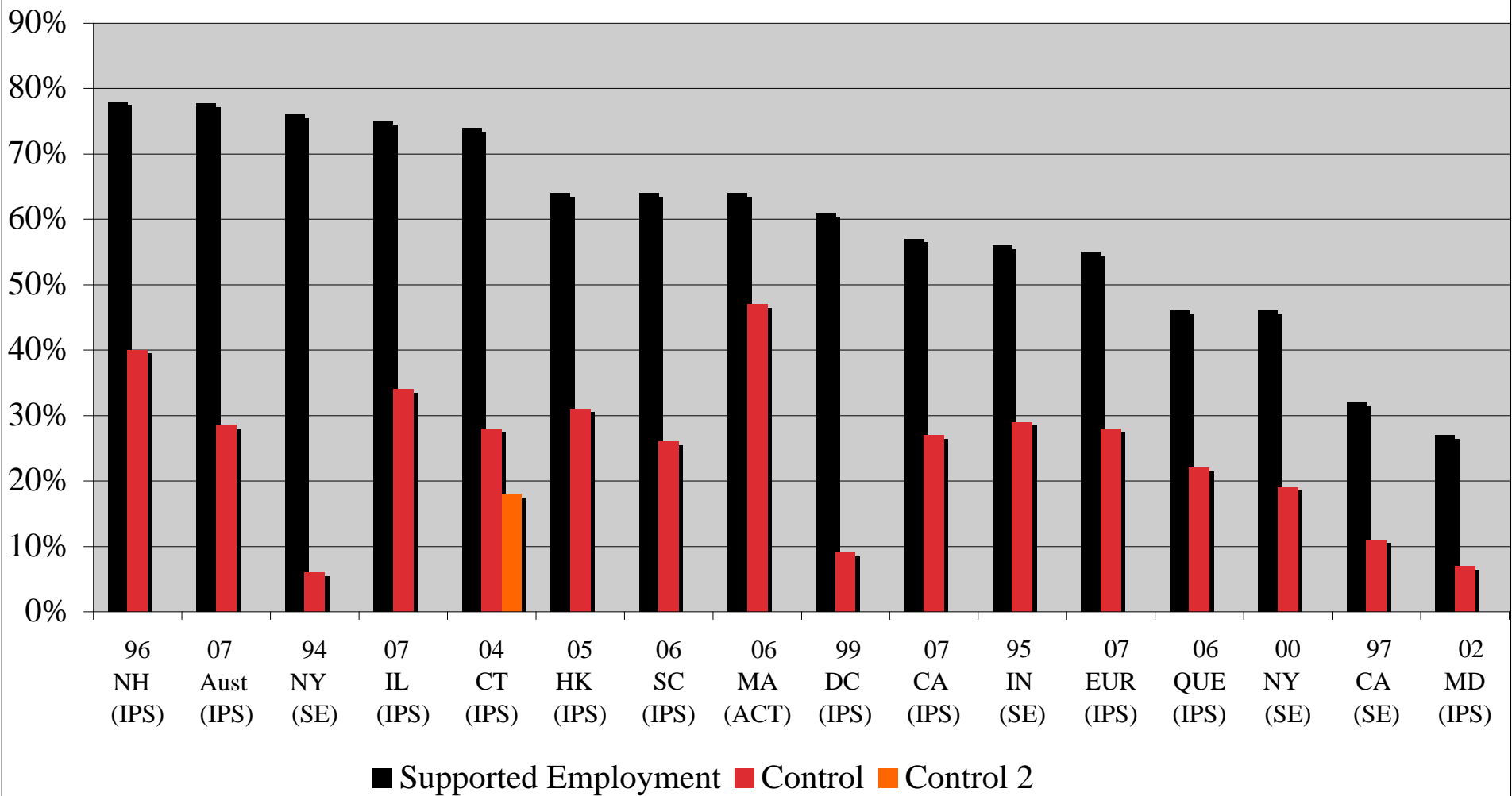
## Vision Statement:

CUCS strives to help people live full and satisfying lives in the larger community. We respect that each person has to define what that means for him or her self. Many people we serve have been conditioned to give up on life's possibilities, or even its necessities. We are responsible for helping them to recover a belief in what is possible and for helping them to achieve it.

# Decision to Adopt Supported Employment

- Decision that CUCS Career Network would adopt SAMHSA guidelines for providing the Evidence-Based Practice of Supported Employment
- This required strategic restructuring
- At the same time, a commitment was made to integrate supported employment services throughout our permanent housing sites

# Figure 1. Competitive Employment Rates in 16 Randomized Controlled Trials of Supported Employment



# CUCS's Evolving Approach to Supported Housing

By examining our assumptions we can make changes to our work:

- Maintaining housing vs. achieving a full and satisfying life in the community
- The importance of examining our own assumptions
- What helps people make positive change in their lives?

# Supported Employment Principles

- Employment Specialists are an integrated part of mental health treatment teams with shared decision-making and have frequent contact with treatment team members
- Employment services, where possible, are delivered in the community, not in the office
- Zero exclusion criteria—all people with mental health conditions should be offered supported employment
- Rapid job search for competitive employment



# Supported Employment Principles continued

- Employment is based on client preference
- Services: job placement and continuous follow-along services for employer and tenant
- Job loss is normalized and reframed as opportunity for growth and experience for future employment
- Personalized benefits planning

“If work makes people with mental illness sick, what do unemployment, poverty, and social isolation cause?”

-Joe Marrone

“Work is stressful, no doubt about it. I will take the stress of work any day over sitting in my apartment with nothing to do.”

-CUCS Career Network Participant

# Implementing SE into Permanent Housing Sites

- Agency workgroups established
- CN decentralized, integrated into 9 sites
- Gradual Roll-out, including marketing to housing staff and residents
- Use of consultant to introduce core principles and ensure fidelity to model
- Employment Specialists integrated into individual housing teams
- Communication and meeting structures put in place
- Clear guidelines were established defining both housing and employment specialists responsibilities

# Changes as a Result of Integration

- More accessible to CUCS residents
- Participant census dramatically increased. CUCS Career Network currently serves over 200 individuals
- The subject of employment has become a topic of everyday discussions within team meetings, staff meetings, and everyday resident interactions

# Developing Employment Opportunities

- The employment specialists and participants find the best possible match between the person and the job
- Work is done out in the community
- Initial contacts with employers focus on gathering information
- Canvassing with or without participant for specific employment opportunities
- The participant ultimately is the person who selects and works the job
- Selecting a path and broadening options
- Responsibilities not only include helping people find jobs, but also staying attuned to how a person's illness and other aspects of life may be affecting their work

# Job Prospecting Role of the Employment Specialist

- “The participant ultimately is the person who selects and works the job”<sup>1</sup>
- Selecting a path and broadening options
- Individualized approach is used towards obtaining employment
- “Responsibilities not only include helping people find jobs but also staying attuned to how a person’s illness and other aspects of life may be affecting their work”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Becker, Drake, [A Working Life for People with Severe Mental Illness](#) (Oxford University Press, 2003) 108.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 109.

# Financial Planning and Benefits Management

- Benefits planning ensures that the participants have accurate information about the effects of income on their benefits
- Participants can often continue to receive benefits or partial benefits even when earning an income from work
- Career Network Entitlements Specialist is available to meet individually with participants



# Challenges/Lessons Learned

- Timeline for actual integration of services was longer than initially anticipated
- Collaboration between all team members is essential
- Direct service staff need resources to adopt changes in practice
- Outcomes need to be transparent and communicated throughout all levels of the agency

# Thank You.

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