

# Vocational Illness Management and Recovery: Wellness For Work

## Participant's Workbook



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## **Overview of Vocational Illness Management and Recovery**

### **Vocational Recovery and Wellness**

Vocational Recovery is the personal process of finding purpose, meaning, and enjoyment at work. Work is an important part of the recovery experience as it provides people with a valued role and resources to live their lives as they choose. People who live with mental health conditions want to work and can work successfully in careers of their choice.

Wellness is a critical resource for all people to achieve their life goals. Wellness at work is especially important because it supports people to thrive and succeed at work. Wellness is also very personal and self-defined state of being that encompasses eight dimensions: physical, mental, social, emotional, financial, spiritual, community, and environmental (Swarbrick, 2006).

The intent of Vocational Illness Management and Recovery (VIMR) is to support the hope and rights of people who have mental health conditions to thrive with wellness in meaningful work. It is a curriculum that is flexible and can be personalized to meet people where they are in their vocational recovery. The focus of VIMR is providing people with inspiration, information, and the strategies they want to support their goal of successful employment.

Broadly, the goals of VIMR are:

- Inspire hope that meaningful work is possible.
- Work in partnership with a person to achieve wellness at work.
- Teach people information and strategies to support their wellness at work.

### **The Importance of Helping People Set Meaningful Goals**

People who have experienced mental health conditions often have been told to discard their dreams because the condition will prevent them from accomplishing what they hope for in their lives. Self-determining meaningful goals, and then accomplishing them, is an essential part of recovery.

The importance of empowering people to choose, to set, and to work towards their personal goals of wellness and work is the heart of VIMR. Each module guides the provider to support personal goal setting that is specific, measurable, and achievable. This constant provider

activity helps the person to move forward with success and happiness towards wellness at work.

## **Core Values of Vocational Illness Management and Recovery**

The core values of VIMR are those upon which recovery-oriented services are based (Farkas 2007; Farkas, Gagne, Anthony et al., 2005).

- **Hope**

First and foremost, the process of leading a person through VIMR involves inspiring hope that wellness and work is not only a possibility, but that wellness and work are everyday realities for people with mental health conditions. This message is critical for empowering people to self-direct and self-determine their lives. It is vital that providers of this curriculum teach and support people with the attitude that they have confidence that people will work with wellness. Providers are most successful when they feel hopeful that the person will achieve their goals, even if the person is pessimistic or lacking in hope.

- **Person Orientation**

VIMR is based on respect for individuals in recovery, including the notion that people have strengths, talents, and interests—not just limitations and illness-related characteristics. Recovery-oriented providers are interested in people's strengths, looking for ways to engage them in their interests, and use their talents for recovery. It is important for individuals in recovery to know that they have strengths, interests, and talents as they often have been served in mental health services that are predominantly focused on their deficits. Empowering individuals in recovery involves reinforcing and using the individual's strengths to help them choose, get, and keep meaningful work. Involving individuals as people with the capacity to learn new information, involving them in determining their work interests and ideas about the strategies they are interested in learning and using, and helping people to reflect on things they did well in their previous experience are some ways in which the VIMR curriculum focuses on a person orientation.

- **Self-Determination**

It is essential for providers to support the self-determination of the person they are assisting to achieve wellness at work. Providers recognize that persons with mental health conditions have a right to choose what goals in wellness and work are important to them

and how they want to proceed in achieving these goals. Providers assist and support people in VIMR to make informed choices about the content that is relevant to their goals and to their experiences. A constant theme in VIMR is providing information, options, and strategies to expand people's awareness of options for wellness at work.

- **Partnership**

The spirit of VIMR is that of partnership. The provider and the person work side-by-side in an equal relationship that reflects respect for one another. The provider's role is to facilitate and support the person's use of the information and strategies in their lives and at work. The person feels respected for their expertise and experiences when with the provider. The person feels supported in his or her decision-making and valued for their perspectives. The provider also is respectful and aware of cultural values, practices, and attitudes that the person lives by and is inclusive of a person's cultural worldview.

## **How Will This Workbook Help You?**

The VIMR process teaches skills and strategies that have been shown to be helpful in alleviating distress caused by symptoms and work-related stress. The strategies in this workbook also can help you solve work relationship issues, handle stress better at work, improve your work-life balance, become more confident, and experience greater wellness. Further, these strategies can help you if you are struggling to maintain sobriety or to live and work without substances. The VIMR provides a structure that can help you make these changes so you achieve your work and recovery goals.

## **How to Use this Workbook**

This workbook teaches you how to reframe experiences and use strategies and skills that are necessary to make changes at work and in your wellness. Therefore, it is important for you to complete the checklists and complete the exercises in each module. Each module assists you to discover individualized strategies to use that are valuable to you. We recommend you start with Module 1, as it provides you with a foundation of work and recovery. After that, we encourage you to choose those modules you believe will be most relevant and useful to you in achieving your work and wellness goals. We hope this workbook will provide you with the opportunity and inspiration to achieve your goals that have meaning to you.

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## **Module 1**

### **Recovery and Vocational Recovery**

*“There is ME, and then there is my illness....I am not defined by my illness!”*  
-DJF

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## Introduction

The intention of Module 1 – Recovery and Vocational Recovery is to:

- Increase your understanding of recovery.
- Identify what helps your recovery.
- Explore how work can contribute to your recovery.

As you go through the Module, you will be encouraged to think about what recovery means to you, to consider what steps may be helpful in reaching your recovery goals, as well as reflect on how work might contribute to your own recovery.

## Things to Know about Recovery

Recovery is a very personal experience. People define recovery in their own way. Here are a few descriptions of recovery that people have shared:

*“Recovery involves the development of new meaning and purpose in one’s life as one grows beyond the catastrophic effects of mental illness.” (Anthony, 1993)*

*“Recovery is a process, a way of life, an attitude, and a way of approaching the day’s challenges.” (Deegan, 1988)*

*“It’s about recovering your life and your identity.”*

*“It’s about having a job that I like, that I am good at, that helps me make a living so I can have a home and a car and do the things I enjoy.”*

*“Recovery to me is about having good health, living without a lot of symptoms, and feeling well enough to do the things I want to do in life.”*

*“Recovery for me is having good relationships and feeling connected. It’s about being able to enjoy life.”*

## Reflective Questions

- What does recovery mean to you?
- If you were to choose one word that best captures what recovery means to you, what would that word be?
- What has influenced your views on recovery?  
Consider, for example, the life experiences you have had, your family's perspective on mental illness and mental health, your cultural and/or religious beliefs.
- What do you want to accomplish in your life?
- What has supported you in achieving what you want in life?
- What has gotten in the way of you achieving what you want in life?

## Recovery Tips and Strategies

There are many things that can support a person's recovery. Helpful strategies that others have identified include:

- **Using Peer Support**

*"Through our peer support center, I share my life with others in hope that they too may meet and overcome challenges that are similar to those I have overcome. I like to believe I am 'opening doors' that will allow others to move forward in their journey of recovery."*

- **Working**

*"Work is very therapeutic for me because I found a job that is nurturing and that allows for creativity, control, and personal growth. I take great joy in my work."*

- **Learning more about my illness**

*"When I stopped blaming life and others for challenges imposed by my illness, I was more able to handle stress, disappointments, and even my successes. I educated myself about my symptoms and how to cope better. Now, they don't interfere as much."*

- **Finding ways to enjoy my Life**

*"I make a plan for my weekends now, so that at least once, I do something that gets me out...I go get a cup of coffee, go to a movie, anything so I don't get too isolated in my room."*

- **Joining Self-Help Groups**

*"With the help of others in my AA group, I am learning to go easier on myself, accept who I am, and be okay with me, flaws, scars, and all."*

- **Volunteering**

*"I have a volunteer job. I have people who need me now. I have good friends. I have a good life."*

- **Making Cultural Connections**

*"I found a network of people from my country who have become my friends and we talk together in our language... It has been very healing for me. We understand each other."*

- **Exercising and Eating Well**

*“Good nutrition has been a key part of my recovery. Exercising has helped me ‘recover’ my body from all the side effects of my illness. For me, recovery is a feeling of wellness.”*

- **Using Complementary Health Practices**

*“I learned to practice Tai Chi, and it has helped me heal my mind with my body and my spirit. It brings me into the moment, and I feel so much better after I practice.”*

- **Taking Small Steps to reach my Goals**

*“Breaking my goals into small steps helped me finish school and finally get a job. I felt better about myself because I was succeeding and making steady progress.”*

- **Having a Pet**

*“My dog needs me and I need her. We are best friends, and she has helped me recover as I need to be well enough to take care of her. I am responsible for her, which helps me remember to take good care of myself.”*

- **Using Spiritual Practices**

*“Prayer allows me to be fully alive and spiritually awakened, which has made all the difference.”*

- **Practicing Creativity: Poetry, Music, Art, Writing**

*“Deliberate mental activity, such as writing, listening to music, playing a musical instrument...developing a hobby, enables me to sharpen and refocus my mind.”*

- **Spending Time with Friends and Family**

*“It is crucial to have someone who believes in you and sees the good in you, and will never give up on you. I have a close friend who is always there for me.”*

- **Choosing to take Medications and Participating in Therapy**

*“I came to understand that there was no exact treatment, and that it was a work in progress, with victories, and setbacks along the way. I now work with my doctor and direct my recovery.”*

## Self-Assessment – Recovery Strategies

### Recovery Strategies Checklist

Directions: Consider your own recovery experience. Check the strategies you currently use that support your recovery. Check the strategies you would like to try. Check the strategies you have no current interest in exploring. For 'Other', add any of your own strategies that are not listed.

Strategy	I use	I want to try	No interest
Using Peer Support			
Working			
Learning more about my Illness			
Finding ways to enjoy Life			
Joining Self-Help Groups			
Volunteering			
Making Cultural Connections			
Exercising and Eating Well			
Using Complementary Health Practices			
Taking Small Steps towards my Goals			
Having a Pet			
Using Spiritual Practices			
Practicing Creativity			
Spending Time with Friends and/or Family			
Medication and/or Therapy			
Other:			
Other:			

## Summary of Recovery

- The experience of a mental health condition may be a part of a person's life, but it does not define the person.
- Recovery is very individualized.
- People use many strategies in their recovery.
- Challenges are a part of recovery.
- Recovery is an ongoing process.
- Recovery is possible for all people.