

Supported employment has the potential to secure work for those who would normally be considered unemployable. Through cognitive remediation and prevocational training, employment specialists can help clients overcome symptoms and medication side effects. It is important to remember, however, that there is more to a site's success.

## Cognitive Remediation

Most people with SMI suffer from severe cognitive impairments from symptoms and medication. These effect areas of function such as

- ◇ attention,
- ◇ working and verbal memory,
- ◇ psychomotor speed,
- ◇ verbal learning,
- ◇ executive function. (6)

The prominence of these impairments in people with SMI may account for below par vocational functioning (5). Since better cognitive function means to better work outcomes, an improvement in cognitive function will bring an improvement in employment outcomes, namely job retention. Cognitive remediation exercises train an individual's brain to overcome these impairments while providing them with minor prevocational training (see the second page for examples). (6) The theory is: if cognitive remediation is integrated into supported employment services clients who are placed in jobs will have longer tenure than they would without it.

## Dealing with substance use comorbidity

Those who suffer from substance use comorbidity are often excluded from vocational services, despite exhibiting similar desires to work. This is often because clinicians

- ◇ see substance abuse as a barrier to employment and won't refer such clients

- ◇ Believe a client has not exhibited readiness for work
- ◇ would rather reward success in substance abuse treatment with employment

These can be remedied if services for co-occurring disorders, such as substance abuse treatment, were integrated into supported employment services. (2)

## Tips on making a site successful

- ◆ Ensure administrators are committed to the employment and recovery of consumers.
- ◆ Make sure employment specialists have strong clinical skills
- ◆ Be sure staff believes in recovery and the principles of supported employment.
- ◆ Use evidence based model to set specific performance standards for staff members. Remove any staff members who do not adhere to them. (2)
- ◆ Provide clients with enough information so they can make informed career choices. (3)
- ◆ Help clients achieve job accommodations such as flexible work hours, unpaid leave days, and flexibility in job assignments.
- ◆ Integrate employment preparation, accelerated entry into work, mental health services, and ongoing employment supports. (4)
- ◆ Help clients find motivation to work other than simply earning money.
- ◆ Help clients overcome cognitive impairments through repetition of tasks or cognitive remediation (5)

The Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, College of Health & Rehabilitation Sciences: Sargent College, is partially funded by the [National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research](#) and the [Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#).

**TABLE 2—THINKING SKILLS FOR WORK PROGRAM: EXAMPLES OF LINKING COGNITIVE REMEDIATION AND WORK**

<b>COGPACK Exercise</b>	<b>Exercise Description</b>	<b>Examples of Relevance to Jobs</b>	<b>Strategies for Improving Performance on Exercise</b>
Compass	Determining the direction of a compass arrow in which north is the color red	Tour guides, messengers, taxi drivers	Repeat to self the rule “red is north”; draw the compass on paper and rotate
Colors and Labels	Words of colors are displayed in a different color than the word depicts (e.g., the word “yellow” is printed in red ink): Say the color in which the word is printed	The ability to ignore extraneous noise and interruptions: customer service employee solving a problem while others are speaking to him/her, cashier being asked a question while ringing up items	Say colors out loud that the word word is printed in to help maintain focus on relevant attribute of stimuli
Eyewitness	Viewing an active street scene and then answering questions questions about the scene	Security personnel monitoring multiple security cameras	Focus on one attribute of scene at a time (e.g., moving vehicles, buildings, people)
Follow up	Determining the next item in a sequence (e.g., Z6Y9X_)	Administrative assistants, clerical work (e.g., filing)	Use paper and pencil to test possible solutions
Information	Look up area codes of countries and type them in; very limited time is given to complete each entry	Airline personnel changing flight reservations, telephone operator, hotel desk clerk	Learn to use the scroller rather than up/down arrow to speed up the search
Labyrinth	Find your way out of a maze without making wrong turns and avoiding dead end alleys	Messengers, courier service, cab drivers, security work and construction personnel (learning building or grounds)	With your eyes or finger, trace a route from the exit through the maze to the entrance; try to remember the route
Memory (shopping items)	Remember a list of shopping items during a distraction filled delay	Wait staff: remembering “the specials of the day” to recite to customers, grocery clerk remembering where to stock items	Chunk items into meaningful bits; use other mnemonics such as putting items in alphabetical order
Piece Work	Determine if items in a moving assembly line differ from template item: Items that differ must be quickly removed from the assembly line	Assembly line work, food service: picking out sandwiches about to be packaged that still need the crusts removed	Look ahead, position finger to make the response when the defective item is within reach
Percent	Cut a cake into multiple equal sections	Cutting cakes, pies, or other food items into equal parts in a restaurant or deli	Plan the cuts before they are made. Imagine what the cake will look like divided into (e.g., 7 equal parts)
Route	Devise a plan to connect multiple locations on a street map in the shortest distance possible	Messenger work, cab driver, mail carrier, porter-maintenance collecting trash in scattered locations	Plan first before connecting; think through several routes before choosing one
Search	Detect a number (or other object) hidden within a complicated picture	Security personnel studying x-ray scans in the airport	Go line by line or column by column; stick to a particular search strategy

## References

- 1) Becker, Deborah R., Bond, Gary R., Marshall, Tina, & Rapp, Charles A. 2008. Key Factors for Implementing Supported Employment. *Psychiatric Services*, 886-892.
- 2) Frounfelker, Rochelle L., Wilkniss, Sandra M., Bond, Gary R., Devitt, Timothy S., Drake, Robert E. May 2011. Enrollment in Supported Employment Services for clients with a co-occurring disorder. *Psychiatric Services*, 545-547.
- 3) Kregel, John. 1997. Supported Employment. *Remedial and Special Education*, 194-196.
- 4) McAlpine, Donna D. & Warner, Lynn. No date. Barriers to Employment among Persons with Mental Illness: A Review of Literature.
- 5) McGurk, Susan R. & Mueser, Kim T. 2004. Cognitive functioning, symptoms, and work: a review and heuristic model. *Schizophrenia Research*, 147-173.
- 6) McGurk, Susan R. & Wykes, Til. 2008. Cognitive Remediation and Vocational Rehabilitation. *Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal*. 350-359.