

July 2006

Employment Often the Difference Between Illness and Recovery

Having and maintaining a job is a vital part of life. We spend half our days at work. We buy food, pay our bills and live our lives from the compensation we receive from being employed. But to someone undergoing treatment for a mental health or substance abuse problem, having a job can be the difference between illness and recovery.

Research has proven that incorporating employment into treatment plays a key role in an individual's successful recovery from mental illness or addiction. That is why the ADAMH system of care has made career development an integral part of its treatment programs, and supports services such as those provided at COVA.

On June 8, 2006, COVA held a graduation ceremony for nine people. These nine graduates, all in treatment for some type of mental health or substance abuse issue, completed a new vocational training program called Careers for the Future. This is a recovery-focused technology education curriculum that provides intensive computer training, health and wellness information and a quarter-long internship. These graduates, who are the first-ever to have completed the Careers program, are now equipped with skills that will help them maintain employment and succeed in the workforce.

"Finding meaningful employment for consumers in the ADAMH system of care is critical to helping them lead healthy, productive lives, as well as to improve the Franklin County community," ADAMH CEO David Royer said. "When people in recovery are given the opportunity to have a job, they in turn contribute positively to the community and become productive, tax-paying citizens."

Internships were set up for the students, based on their interests, with several local organizations, including Community Housing Network, FIRSTLINK, the Columbus Literacy Council, The Ohioana Library and Squire, Sanders and Dempsey law firm. Careers for the Future, which began in fall 2005, is funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education; its wellness segment was developed by graduate-level nursing students in The Ohio State University College of Nursing.

Kappy Madenwald, Clinical Director for ADAMH, gave the keynote address at the graduation ceremony.

"Studies have shown that people in recovery are highly motivated employees that strive to work hard, be part of a team environment, and learn new skills," Madenwald said. "People can recover and recovering people work. These graduates are living proof of that fact."

By being employed, consumers undergoing mental health or substance abuse treatment can improve their self-esteem and achieve personal goals, while improving their chances of complete recovery at the same time.

"We are encouraged and inspired by the positive impact the Careers for the Future program has had on these students' lives," COVA President Judy Braun said. "Our hope is that the success of this inaugural class will motivate others to explore technology that can be fundamental to finding employment, and participate in the program as we begin immediately to recruit new students for the 2006-2007 class."

Each year, COVA offers help and support to more than 2,400 people suffering from mental illness who need assistance with career development and benefits counseling. In 2006, ADAMH allocated more than \$860,000 to COVA in support of its employment services.

COVA also has received generous corporate support for an innovative new computer donation program. Grange Insurance Companies and Dawson Resources are donating late-model computers for COVA to refurbish and give to clients for home use. Although COVA provides a computer resource center, many clients feel a lack of home computers can be an impediment to finding employment. The first clients to receive the computers will be the 2005-2006 Careers course graduates.