

# OPENING DOORS



## Description:

Until recently, career development, guidance and readiness have not been the focus of employment and supported employment services for individuals in recovery from serious mental health conditions. Individuals in recovery continue to be either unemployed or underemployed despite having multiple talents and interests that would be assets in the world of work.

At BU Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, we believe that helping individuals in recovery achieve meaningful work leads to greater engagement in work, a fuller life, and increased access to resources. We view career through a different lens than is commonly understood. Career is typically viewed as a linear process that leads to a single profession or path. By this definition, most people in the US have had 3 or more career paths in their lifetime. This begs the question of whether we are adequately defining “career” to be inclusive i.e. acknowledging multiple barriers, and pathways, and acknowledging the specific needs of diverse groups of individuals. We also know that job training, career guidance, and current labor market information are critical elements that help unemployed individuals make informed decisions about training opportunities and their careers.

Opening Doors is a new career guidance intervention for individuals in recovery that uses traditional career guidance resources, progressive employment principles (to promote rapid engagement with the workforce), and mainstream Internet-based resources to support the career development of individuals with serious mental health conditions. To the best of our knowledge, the Opening Doors intervention is a new intervention and there are no similar services available for individuals in recovery.

Opening Doors is designed as a 12-week group and individual career guidance intervention. The curriculum is delivered in small groups over 20 sessions and 8 weekly individual sessions that begin in the middle of the intervention and extend beyond the end of the 12-weeks of group sessions. At present, the OD intervention is undergoing research to test its efficacy.

The OD curriculum is expected to assist participants expand their knowledge of career resources and enhance skills in using the internet for career exploration, which are critical to today’s workforce. Participants are assisted in identifying their career values, aptitudes, skills and credentials, select career interests, explore potential occupations, map critical career development activities and develop a career plan and goal. The group-based component of the intervention orients individuals to Internet-based resources not generally part of vocational services for individuals in recovery. There are also opportunities for participants to engage in a variety of pre-vocational activities such as informational interviews with employers, job shadowing, apprenticeships, on-the-job training, etc. Additional components of Opening Doors

includes teaching individuals about the nuances of disclosure of disability and accommodations in the workplace and skills and strategies to enhance and maintain wellness in one's career or work. As a final product, participants will prepare an electronic career portfolio.

The following is the expected impact of OD:

- Individuals participating in OD are expected to have greater:
  - Clarity of their career goals by developing a career plan
  - Knowledge of career resources
  - Use of internet-based resources for the purpose of career exploration,
  - Pre-employment activities through informational interviews with employers (e.g., job shadowing, apprenticeships, on-the-job training).
- OD is designed to add to the array of tested vocational interventions in the field
- OD has the potential for use in multiple settings (e.g. in addition to evidence-based supported employment interventions, in community college settings, etc.)
- Meaningful integration of resources available to the mainstream population