



Burton Blatt Institute
SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

NEWS RELEASE

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Real JOBS NY assists people with psychiatric disabilities find sustainable employment

Program is based at two community colleges in the Capital District and Adirondack Region

SYRACUSE, NEW YORK – For Jill Shepherd, who has battled depression and alcoholism, overcoming the barriers that stood in her way to finding a job seemed like an impossible task. When conventional methods of obtaining employment did not work, Shepherd enrolled in the Real JOBS NY program, which she credits with changing her outlook on life.

“Before starting the program, I was in serious trouble – in a state of panic, without a job and nearly broke,” explains Shepherd, who now works as a retail cashier. “The program gave me the skills and encouragement to land on my feet again. Working has helped with my self-esteem and quality of life.”

Shepherd is one of approximately 75 people with psychiatric disabilities who have been placed in jobs after enrolling in Real JOBS NY – a collaboration of the Burton Blatt Institute (BBI) at Syracuse University, Workforce Development Institute (WDI), and the New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services (NYAPRS).

People with psychiatric disabilities face disproportionately high rates of unemployment. To address this issue and develop a pathway to sustainable employment, Real JOBS NY provides a unique support system for its participants, focusing on individually tailored plans to meet the specific needs of each client.

“This program targets the most underserved population of people with disabilities, which are those with psychiatric issues. People with mental illness have the highest unemployment of people with all disabilities,” says Stephan Haimowitz, BBI Research Associate. “Real JOBS NY is particularly attractive to people with psychiatric disabilities because, unlike many other job training programs, our staff develop a personalized plan.”

Based out of Schenectady County Community College and SUNY Adirondack, Real JOBS NY vocational counselors provide recovery-oriented and person-centered planning, individualized case management, and referrals to the services and supports that can help clients achieve short-term employment goals as well as career aspirations as part of a long-term recovery vision.

Participants have access to a broad array of services, including those at the local community colleges.

“Location matters. The community college environment is highly appealing to people with psychiatric disabilities who are seeking employment assistance. It is less stigmatizing to those who have tried and failed in a traditional center,” notes Stephen Traver, WDI Director of Vocational Services. “They are more likely to come to a program that is not housed in a mental health setting.”

Traver says one of the clearest measures of the program’s success comes in the recent employment figures. Among those enrolled in Real JOBS NY during the 2009-2010 period, 64 percent were employed at least three months after being placed in a job. The national average for similar programs is only nine percent.

“Unemployment and poverty have devastating effects on the mental health and quality of life of people with psychiatric disabilities. More than two-thirds of people with psychiatric disabilities want to work, and only twelve percent are afforded that opportunity,” notes Oscar Jimenez, Director of Community and Economic Development with NYAPRS. “Programs like Real JOBS NY are vital to change this unjustifiable disparity.”

In addition, employers are discovering benefits of hiring people with psychiatric disabilities. “There’s an advantage of having someone in your workforce who has a real ability to solve issues in life and can translate those skills on the job,” adds Traver. “They bring a unique perspective.”

Real JOBS NY is funded by the U.S. Rehabilitation Services Administration “Projects with Industry” grant. Residents of Albany, Schenectady, Saratoga, Warren or Washington counties who are interested in the program, should contact Stephen Traver at straver@wdiny.org or (518) 272-3500.

About the Burton Blatt Institute at Syracuse University

BBI is dedicated to practical inclusive solutions for people with disabilities worldwide. With a staff of more than 60 and offices in Syracuse, NY, Washington, DC, Atlanta, GA, New York, NY, Los Angeles, CA, and Tel Aviv, Israel, BBI engages in projects on civil rights, entrepreneurship, universal design, employment and economic advancement, technology innovation, and attitudes about disability in traditional and new media. For more information, visit <http://bbi.syr.edu>.

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