

# Promoting Effective Connections between Community Mental Health Care Providers and Employers

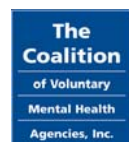
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# Promoting Effective Connections between Community Mental Health Care Providers and Employers

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## Introduction

Mental health care providers of vocational services face a challenge in identifying employers ready and willing to hire consumers. The Workplace Center has undertaken a two-year study with eleven agencies in New York City to explore, for them, the potential of the companies with whom they do business (*vendors*) as a source of employment for consumers and to identify strategies that encourage vendors to extend their business relationship with agencies to include the recruitment and hire of consumers. Because these agencies provide vocational services in a wide range of service environments including hospital settings, housing programs and multi-service agencies with such programs as outpatient clinics, CDTs or IPRTs, their experiences can serve as a model for others interested in establishing such relationships.

The focus of the first year was to explore how to generate a list of vendors and the most effective way to reach the individual at these companies who is responsible for recruitment and hire. *It also investigated effective strategies for learning how responsive the vendor is to the marketing of the agency's programs and services and the employment of people with mental health conditions.* During the first year, using eligibility guidelines provided by the Workplace Center, agencies:

- identified a sample of their vendors to participate in the study
- provided the Workplace Center with the name, address and phone number of the current contact at the vendor and
- provided the Workplace Center with the name of the individual at the agency who interacts with the vendor's contact (sales rep).

The Workplace Center then:

- contacted each selected vendor using the agency's contact as the initial introductory resource
- determined the path to the most appropriate individual to ask about employment opportunities and
- completed an interview with that individual about the vendor's labor force needs and recruitment strategies, their responsiveness to employees with mental health conditions and the vendor's understanding and perception of the vocational services offered by the agency.

This report is a summary of the responses of 92 vendors from the eleven participating agencies. Although additional vendors' names were supplied by agencies, interviews with them were not completed for a variety of reasons (see Tables 1 and 2).

### **Obtaining a Vendor List**

It may seem that obtaining a list of vendors is straightforward. In no instance was this the case. In general, obtaining an accurate, complete and appropriately targeted vendor list involves input from a variety of agency personnel. In particular, it is important that personnel with direct, day-to-day vendor contact (usually, but not always, the person in charge of purchasing) provide support and insight into the process of selecting the list of vendors. The organization and mission of the agency determined other key individuals with direct vendors contacts. For example, when the agency includes housing, the Director of Facilities is the key to contact with vendors that provide services and goods for building maintenance and materials suppliers. When the agency holds events, like an annual holiday party or fundraiser, the event organizer has contact with vendors such as food suppliers, caterers and venues where the events are held.

### **Criteria for Inclusion**

For the purposes of the research project, Workplace Center staff set criteria for inclusion of vendors in the study. The criteria were intended to maximize inclusion of vendors with whom agencies have a longstanding relationship and who might have jobs accessible to consumers. For example, it is unlikely that calling an 800 number of a company in Minnesota would yield jobs in New York City. The Workplace Center criteria were as follows:

- Two years minimum relationship with the agency
- No existing job search relationship
- \$25,000 per year minimum revenue to vendor
- Offices in the New York City area

Agencies also set criteria for inclusion. For example, some agencies wanted to exclude those vendors whom they contact for fund raising. Other agencies recommended particular vendors with which they had particularly strong relationships and that they felt would be responsive. The final list of vendors met the research and agencies' criteria.

### **Participation Rates**

Overall, agencies provided 228 vendor names. A few vendors could not be included because they did not meet study criteria. Often, in these cases, after contacting the vendor, it became clear that they did not have offices in the New York City area. There were also a few vendors that were used by more than one agency. These vendors are not double counted; therefore, 186 vendors were included in the project sample. Of these, 92 were interviewed (50% response rate; see Table 1).

**TABLE 1: Participation Rates**

<b>Vendor participation</b>	<b>All Vendors</b>
Number of vendors provided by agencies	228
Vendors that did not meet important study criteria	33

(e.g. no local offices)	
Number of vendors overlapping on agency lists	9
<b>Vendors included in the project</b>	<b>186</b>

### Reasons for Not Participating

Four reasons help to explain the instances when vendors were not interviewed. These include that it was the company policy not to participate in research or they were not interested at this time, a convenient interview time could not be scheduled, contact information was incomplete or the company receptionist would not forward the call to the key individual at the vendor. Table 2 shows the breakdown of reasons why vendor representatives were not interviewed.

**TABLE 2: Reasons for Not Interviewing a Vendor**

<b>Reason Not Interviewed</b>	<b>Percent of Vendors (N=186)</b>
Unable to schedule an interview	19%
Company policy not to participate	14%
Incomplete contact information	11%
Gatekeepers	6%
<b>Vendors Not Interviewed Total</b>	<b>50%</b>

**Unable to Schedule an Interview:** In some instances, it was not possible to find a time to conduct the interview. For these vendors it is important to note that this was not an indication of the vendor’s lack of interest or a vendor’s negative attitude towards the project; it simply reflected the amount of time that it can take to connect with some employers. Scheduling conflicts, telephone tag and unexpected events such as the respondent being out sick made it impossible to schedule an interview during the study time frame. If time had allowed, with persistence, interviews with these vendors were probable. *This finding helps agencies understand and plan around the considerable time required to establish solid employer connections.*

**Company policy or lack of interest:** Some companies have policies not to participate in research. These companies, however, might be open to an approach from a social service agency as part of an employment relationship. Other companies declined to participate for a wide range of reasons from lack of interest to lack of time.

**Incomplete contact information:** Another common reason for not including a vendor in the study or interviewing a vendor was that the contact information was not current or accurate. Searches on the Internet and calling the telephone information service did not produce updated information. This highlights the fact that *companies seem to come and go and move around more frequently than might be expected* and that, for some agencies, it is difficult to keep up-to-date records. *This experience, however, serves as a reminder of the importance of having current, detailed records.*

**Gatekeepers:** In some cases, when follow up calls were made to the recipient of the letter, the person who answered the line (not the person to whom the letter had been addressed) would not (or felt she/he could not) forward the call. Entry into this kind of company *alerts jobs developers that more assistance from the Purchasing Manager may be needed. Established connections always help get around the gatekeeper.*

### Profile of Participating Agency Vendors

Each vendor was categorized by industrial sector, size, whether they had a Human Resources (HR) department or Employee Assistance Program and whether or not they were unionized. Table 3 provides a profile of the vendors interviewed for the project.

**TABLE 3: Profile of Participating Agency Vendors**

<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Percent of Vendors</b>
<b><u>Industrial Sector (n=92)*</u></b>	
Services	43%
Finance, insurance, real estate	12%
Retail trade	11%
Wholesale trade	11%
Engineering related	5%
Telephone/ communications	4%
Construction	3%
Manufacturing	3%
Electric, gas and sanitary services	2%
Communications - publishing	1%
Distribution	1%
Transportation	1%
Wholesale trade and retail trade	1%
<b><u>Size (n=92)*</u></b>	
Large (more than 500 employees)	16%
Medium (21 – 499 employees)	45%
Small (up to 20 employees)	39%
<b><u>Other Characteristics</u></b>	
Companies with HR department	34% (n=90; 2 missing)
Companies with an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)	27% (n=62; 30 missing)
Companies with union membership	31% (n=86; 6 missing)
<b><u>Interviewee Characteristics (n=91; 11 missing)</u></b>	
Less than a year with company	7%
1 – 5 years with company	32%

More than 5 years with company	60%
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\* Percents do not add up to 100% due to rounding

**Employer Type:** Vendors included in the project were from a wide range of industrial sectors. The largest category is the service sector. There is variety within this category as well. Vendors in the service sector include facilities maintenance services, food services, security, and computer consultants among others. *The wide variety of vendors is encouraging. It can help meet a wider variety of consumer career interests.*

**Vendor Size:** Most frequently, the vendors interviewed for the project are medium sized companies (21-499 employees). This is followed by small companies, which have up to 20 employees. The smallest category is large companies, which are 16% of the total. This sample is consistent with the New York State Department of Labor data<sup>1</sup>, which show that 70% of workers in New York City are employed in companies with less than 500 employees. Further, the Small Business Administration's data<sup>2</sup> highlight the importance of businesses that employ fewer than 500 employees to the economy by showing that these businesses<sup>3</sup> generate 60 to 80 percent of net new jobs annually. Understanding how businesses with fewer than 500 employees hire and recruit, therefore, is particularly useful.

**HR, EAP and Unions:** The purpose of this project is to target the individuals with responsibility for recruitment and hire for their companies. *If the company has a Human Resource(HR) Department, the individuals responsible for recruitment and hire are usually located there. Thus, when building a relationship with an employer, it is essential to know whether such a department exists.* Typically, the larger the company, the more likely that it will have an HR department.

*Most vendors, because they are smaller, do not have an HR department.* Approximately one third of companies that completed the interview have an HR Department. The others are small enough that the owner or another staff member does all recruiting and hiring. For example, at a small telecommunications company, the interviewee said that he wears "three hats," meaning that he works directly with customers installing telephone lines, he has some administrative responsibilities and he is involved in hiring and recruitment. *In these cases, the connection to the sales representative is particularly important. The sales reps in smaller companies often have input directly into hiring and recruitment.*

EAPs and Unions can be a source of support to consumers once they are hired. It is valuable, therefore, for provider agencies to learn if this potential resource is available to employees at each vendor. Roughly a third of vendors appear to be unionized or have EAPs but the number of companies where this information was not provided makes it difficult to evaluate.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.labor.state.ny.us>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.sba.gov/>

<sup>3</sup> SBA definition of small business varies by industry; our categorization falls within SBA categorization where data are available (see <http://app1.sba.gov/faqs/faqindex.cfm?areaID=15>)

## Labor Force Needs and Recruitment

Understanding employers' labor force needs provides important information to *market the ways consumers might fill these needs* and about how to more effectively prepare consumers for work. During the interviews, vendors talked about:

- recruitment strategies
- whether or not they hire each year
- whether they have trouble finding qualified applicants to fill their vacancies
- recruitment of people with disabilities, including those with mental health conditions.

Table 4 summarizes vendors' responses.

**TABLE 4: Recruitment and Labor Force Needs**

Recruitment and Hire	Percent of Vendors
Most frequently used recruitment strategies (rank ordered)	1. Word of mouth 2. Advertisements 3. Intermediary Services** (n=89; 3 missing)
Vendors who hire every year	86% (n=90; 2 missing)
Employers who have trouble finding qualified applicants	58% (n=87; 5 missing)
Employers who actively recruit people with disabilities, including mental health conditions	16%

**Recruitment:** Word of mouth is among all employers' top recruitment strategies *underscoring the importance of making personal connections as part of an effective recruitment effort*. Other frequently mentioned recruitment strategies include advertisements and intermediary services. Most companies use word of mouth. Among small and medium sized companies who do not use word of mouth exclusively, the most frequent recruitment strategy is advertisements. The publications they use are wide ranging. Trade publications and local newspapers are used as often as major publications like the *New York Times*. Using intermediary services was the third most frequently mentioned recruitment strategy. A much higher percentage of large companies use intermediary services such as private recruitment agencies to whom they paid a fee. *There seems to be a very low awareness of placement services that specialize in serving people with disabilities or mental health conditions, like VESID. Very few said they had used VESID, and many said they had never heard of VESID.*

The size of the company is related to the range of strategies used. Small companies use fewer recruitment strategies, on average, than large companies, and they more frequently described word of mouth as their most effective strategy. Other

recruitment strategies begin to appear more regularly with medium sized and large companies. For example, larger companies use employment agencies, partner with educational institutions and post vacancies on the Internet more frequently than small companies. The recruitment strategies that begin to appear more frequently with the medium and large sized companies are also more concentrated in those companies with HR departments.

A small proportion of vendors said that they actively recruit people with disabilities, including those with mental health conditions. When businesses actively recruit, they described a situation in which they have established a relationship with an agency over time and recruit from this agency for specific vacancies as they become available. For example, one employer said that he got to know about an agency through his company's business relationship with that agency. He was interested in learning more about the agency's mission, which led to discussions about their consumers and their vocational programs. He eventually hired a consumer and got support from the agency regarding the consumers' condition and accommodation needs. The employment experience was successful. He considered this employee a valuable asset and is interested in finding more employees this way.

**Hiring and Available Jobs:** *The majority of employers interviewed for the project hire, even in times of recession. There always seem to be jobs available. Additionally, most employers said that they have trouble finding qualified applicants. Several themes dominated employers' explanations of why they had difficulties. These main themes are listed below with excerpts from interview notes to provide examples.*

#### Lack of specific qualifications and experience

- They need qualified/trained legal secretaries.
- A special driver's license is required, which makes it difficult to find drivers.
- This job requires highly specialized skills, and not many people have those skills today.
- Has trouble finding the "experienced hire," the "mid career with 3+ years of experience."
- They have continual trouble finding sales staff. She felt they could improve the selection process.
- It's harder to find good sales staff. "It takes a certain kind of person to do sales."

#### People are not interested in working or are generally not good workers

- "I don't want to work with people who don't want to work."
- She doesn't feel that people have a good work ethic these days.
- Even though they have a growing pool, quality is lacking.
- He has trouble finding people with enough initiative to do the job properly.
- They are qualified on paper but, in reality, turn out not to be good workers.

#### Some aspect of the job makes it undesirable

- He has trouble finding people because the salary is relatively low and the job is demanding.
- He said his trade is "less than desirable," which makes it hard to find good people.
- "Very often people are not interested in doing this job."
- "Kids don't grow up wanting to [do this job] anymore."

This information is useful in exploring job goals with consumers and marketing to employers. *Findings reinforce the importance of knowing about an employer's labor*

*force needs so that a good match can be made between consumers' skills and interests and employer needs, or finding an employer with specific needs and matching them with a consumer willing to be trained.*

**Responsiveness to Employees with Mental Health Conditions**

To assess the responsiveness of each workplace to employees with mental health conditions, Workplace Center staff asked employers what issues might raise co-workers' concerns when working with a person with a mental health condition.

**Co-worker responsiveness:** Overall, employers feel that co-worker response to people with mental health conditions falls into three categories:

1. Most co-workers **would** be comfortable working with a person with a mental health condition.
2. Some co-workers would not be comfortable working with a person with a mental health condition while others would be comfortable.
3. Most co-workers **would not** be comfortable working with a person with a mental health condition.

Table 5 shows how employers responded to interview questions about their company's responsiveness to employees with mental health conditions. Suggesting that the workplace might be responsive to consumers, two thirds of respondents feel that their co-workers would be comfortable working with a person with a mental health condition. The one third of respondents that feel their co-workers would have a mixed response or be uncomfortable are not ruled out as possible sites for placement but suggest the need for workplace education.

**TABLE 5: Responsiveness to Employees with Mental Health Conditions**

<b>Level of comfort</b>	<b>Percent of Vendors (n=72)*</b>
1. Most co-workers <b>would</b> be comfortable working with a person with a mental health condition.	67%
2. Some co-workers would not be comfortable working with a person with a mental health condition while others would be.	22%
3. Most co-workers <b>would not be comfortable</b> working with a person with a mental health condition.	11%

\*20=missing

**Employer Perceptions:** Employers were also asked about the concerns they would have if they were considering an applicant with a mental health condition. *This information helps providers tailor their education and marketing effort to address specific concerns while at the same time suggesting that a well-marketed consumer would be well received.* During the interview, employers were asked which of the following would be concerns for them if they were considering an applicant with a mental health condition including:

Reliability	Work group morale
Productivity	Supervisory time
Cost of accommodation	Violence
Safety	Qualifications
Loyalty	Liability
Lack of experience	Gaps in work history

Table 6 shows how frequently the employers felt that items on the list would be issues for them when considering an applicant with a mental health condition. Items are listed from most frequently to least frequently mentioned.

**Table 6: Concerns When Considering an Applicant with a Mental Health Condition**

Concern	All Vendors (n=78)*
Reliability	49%
Productivity	38%
Safety	32%
Violence	29%
Qualifications	26%
Supervisory time	26%
Liability	24%
Workgroup morale	21%
Lack of experience	21%
Gaps in work history	21%
Cost of accommodation	18%
Loyalty	17%

\*14=missing

*Reliability and productivity are the most important issues to employers. They are concerned about getting the job done.* Some, however, hold common misperceptions about people with mental health conditions including the potential for violence, safety concerns and the costs associated with accommodation. For example, one respondent commented that he couldn't imagine hiring someone with a mental health condition to work at his company. Many jobs at his company required that workers climb scaffolding, and he believed that someone with a mental health condition might become unstable while on the scaffolding and place other workers in jeopardy.

*Only 17% of respondents said that they have particular issues specifically with applicants with mental health conditions.* For example, a number of employers talked about how important it is for employees to deal well with the public. By their understanding, however, someone with a mental health condition responds inappropriately to situations, so they were not sure if a person with a mental health condition would be able to interact with the public appropriately. Another concern is that a person with a mental health condition would not be able to handle workplace stress and wondered if it might be a greater problem for an applicant with a mental health condition.

The majority (83%) qualified their responses explaining that these concerns usually apply to all job applicants, and are not restricted to those with mental health conditions. *These employers stress that their primary concern is finding capable employees.* Factors beyond required job related capabilities are irrelevant to them as long as the applicant can do the job. Employers responded repeatedly that they are concerned that the applicant be able to meet the basic demands of the job.

**Experience with Accommodation:** One indicator of an employer’s responsiveness to people with disabilities is their experience providing accommodation. Employers were asked to describe their experience providing accommodations for employees with disabilities including mental health conditions. *While employers have had some experience providing accommodations, this experience is limited.* For example, some employers had altered workspaces for employees with physical disabilities but had never provided accommodations for an employee with a mental health condition. Other employers said that they had provided accommodations but they simply meant that their organization had policies such as flextime or sick leave.

A number of employers had concerns about providing accommodation that suggest that education is needed around the effectiveness and costs of accommodation and how the agency can be a resource and support in this process. For example, there is some uncertainty about how accommodations would be effective in helping a person to meet job requirements. Vendors also expressed concern that providing accommodations for one employee would disrupt how the group works together, and they worried that they do not have the resources to enable them to provide accommodations.

**Vendor Understanding and Perception of Agencies**

Vendors’ willingness to recruit and hire people with mental health conditions is affected by the extent to which they understand the provider as a resource and support. To get a sense of vendors’ understanding and perception of social service agencies, as well as their awareness of the kind of work agencies do, vendors were asked how familiar they are with the agencies and their programs. Their responses are summarized in Table 7. Overall, only 38% of vendors claim to be familiar or very familiar with the agency.

**TABLE 7: Vendor Understanding and Perception of Agency**

<b>Familiarity with agency</b>	<b>Percent of Vendors (n=76)*</b>
Not Familiar	45%
Moderately familiar	17%
Familiar	29%
Very familiar	9%

\*16=missing

**How Agencies Can be Most Helpful in Supporting Employment of People With Mental Health Conditions**

Vendors identified ways that agencies could be most helpful in supporting employment of people with mental health conditions. Vendors’ suggestions include what agencies should know about companies when seeking employment opportunities as well as

the kind of support employers would need if they hired a person with a mental health condition. Table 8 shows the types of things that are most important for agencies to know about prospective employers. These include:

**TABLE 8: What Agencies Should Know About Employers**

Most important things agency should know about employer*	Percent of Vendors (n=73)* +
Core competencies required for available jobs	44%
Workplace environment and culture	40%
Characteristics of the industry and labor market trends	16%
Vendor's acceptance of people with mental health conditions	11%
Vendor does not know enough about agencies to answer the question	10%
Types of jobs available	4%

\*19=missing

+ Number of suggestions is greater than 100% because respondents offered multiple suggestions.

**Core Competencies:** Employers emphasized that job developers should understand the core competencies required for available jobs. Core competencies include specific skills, experience, and credentials required for various jobs; this knowledge can be gained by studying job descriptions carefully and discussing required competencies with people who do hiring and recruitment.

**Workplace Environment:** Many employers felt that providers should understand the workplace environment; they suggested that agencies visit them to gain a better understanding of the working environment and culture.

**Acceptance of People with Mental Health Conditions:** Interestingly, some vendors said that the most important thing for an agency to know is that the vendor is accepting of people with mental conditions and might be open to hiring if the correct supports are in place.

**Knowledge of Industry:** Vendors said it was important for vocational staff to be knowledgeable about the industry to which the vendor belongs and to have researched their company in particular. For example, if the vendor is a printing company, then the job developer should know the latest labor market trends in the printing industry. It would also be impressive to employers if vocational staff knew specifics about their particular company, for example, how long they have been in business or its complete line of products and services. (The agency's purchasing agent may be very helpful in providing this information.)

### **Type of Support Vendors Need**

Vendors identified the types of support they would like if hiring a person with a mental health condition.

**Establishing Closer Relationships:** Employers are interested in establishing closer relationships with agencies from whom they would hire. They described partnerships, which can be characterized as having better and more frequent communication and establishing trust based on an understanding of each other's needs.

Employers were asked how a social service agency might be most helpful to them in supporting employment of people with mental health conditions. Employers felt that communication with social service agencies could be improved. Specifically, the improvements were related to the amount and duration of the contact between the employer and the provider. Employers want to communicate frequently with provider agencies from whom they had hired. Employers made suggestions like wanting contact "increased to daily or weekly," even that "the agency needed to be accessible at all times." Employers called for "more direct involvement," "consultations a lot at the beginning," "more frequent contact," "constant contact," and "more regular contact."

In addition to frequency, another aspect of improved communications is that *communication should be sustained*. Employers want a "continuing dialogue." They emphasized the importance of keeping in contact once a consumer was hired, of "maintaining ongoing contact," and the importance of "follow up after placement."

While employers acknowledged that initial contact would take place over the phone, their responses also underscored *the importance of visiting workplaces for face-to-face meetings*. Agency staff should be prepared to meet with a variety of people at a company like representatives from HR, supervisors, and also employees, once they are hired. Visits would help agency staff develop a more comprehensive understanding of the company. It also emphasizes that more than one person at the company is involved in a successful employment outcome, and the same person may not always be available.

The goal of this frequent, regular and sustained contact is to establish trust over time. *Employers need to develop confidence that providers will be able to support them* to "help with any problems that might arise." They want to be able to go to the provider for advice on how to handle situations that might occur due to the consumer's condition. "[Agencies] shouldn't just send a consumer over. They should be directly involved with [the consumer's] employment." Another employer described having the agency "...act as an interface, to be a sponsor for the employee." Employers reported that they need support and information for successful employment outcomes. As providers support employers in developing new skills and insights that promote successful employment for their consumers, a stronger relationship defined by confidence and trust in each other will result. Additionally, providers and employers will develop a better understanding of each other's needs.

**Referring Qualified Applicants:** In the context of a trusting relationship, employers are very interested in agencies referring qualified applicants to them. Employers and providers should have an understanding of each other's goals so that they could feel confident that the provider would refer an appropriate applicant. One employer described a relationship with social service agencies that is similar to the

relationship he has with an employment agency in which the employment agency representative meets with him regularly to talk about his company's needs and determine what sort of applicants should be referred. *Of the employers that said that a social service agency could be helpful to them by referring applicants, all stipulated that the person be qualified for the vacancy.* Determining a consumer's appropriateness for the vacancy requires an understanding of the job description, skills, experience, and credentials required. Employers emphasize that they do not hire people because they are nice or because hiring them is a charitable thing to do. To be taken seriously, it must be clear that the agency has done sufficient research on the employer and the types of jobs they have, to respond appropriately to job openings. Employers are accustomed to such behavior when they do business with employment agencies and temporary help agencies (i.e., other labor market intermediaries.)

**Information and Support to Meet Consumers' Needs in the Workplace and the Importance of Disclosure:** The most frequent response by employers, when asked how a service agency might be most helpful to them in supporting employment of people with mental health conditions, was that agencies need to provide them with information and support to help meet consumers' needs in the workplace.

Employers voiced the need for information about:

- Accommodation needs
- How to work with someone with a mental health condition
- What to do in an emergency
- What to do if the consumer stopped taking his/her medication

To be effective, employers do not want to be "led on." They want to be equipped to deal appropriately with an employee with a mental health condition, and, therefore, they feel disclosure is essential. They want clarification about an applicant's condition; employers need to know how to respond correctly to the needs of employees. Thus, disclosure is a part of establishing stronger relationships with agencies from which they would hire. *All aspects of the closer relationship described by employers assume disclosure.*

**Sharing Expertise:** Employers appreciate the expertise that providers have on mental health conditions. Employers acknowledged their need for support and information to meet consumers' needs in the workplace, and they also spoke openly about their limited experience with employees with mental health conditions.

To fill the gap in experience, employers often want agencies to provide training for their staff on topics related to mental health. For example, employers wanted training on the variety and prevalence of mental health conditions, so that staff would be more open and receptive to people with mental health conditions. They were interested in training that addresses stereotypes that people often have and on the importance of work in people's lives. They are also interested in seminars about the agencies' services. One employer thought that agencies should offer training to employers at various levels, from

approaching individual employers to being speakers at industry meetings. In summary, employers want agencies to share their expertise with them.

**Raising Employer Awareness of Agencies' Services:** Importantly, some employers could not provide us with suggestions for how a social service agency could support them because they do not know what service providers do and have limited experiences with employees with mental health conditions. They do not use employment agencies for recruitment, so they do not know how this type of recruitment works, and what would make it more successful. One employer suggested that the agency invite employers to their offices. Employers could bring information about their companies and vacancies and the agency could provide information about the goals and objectives of their programs.

## Conclusions

Vendors can be a new source of employment opportunities for consumers ready for placement from their vocational services programs. This potential is enhanced when provider agencies:

- Generate a vendor list with input from all individuals who have direct contact with vendors.
- Obtain insight from agency staff with direct vendor contact about the employers' responsiveness to an agency outreach.
- Maintain up-to-date vendor lists that include complete contact information.
- Prepare to invest some time in follow-up because time constraints make many employers difficult to reach.
- Remember that jobs are available. The greatest concern for employers when considering applicants is that they be qualified for the job.
- Make personal contact with employers. This is essential since word of mouth is a frequent recruitment strategy, and is the primary way employers establish trusting relationships with providers that lead to hire of people with mental health conditions.
- Have a good understanding of vendors' labor force needs to maximize the match between consumers' skills and interests and vendors' needs. The problems finding qualified applicants suggest areas where consumers might choose to pursue training in order to meet employer needs.
- Include an educational component that responds to concerns around productivity, reliability, and safety as part of the marketing strategy.
- Insure that marketing efforts respond to, and educate around, working with a person with a mental health condition in order to alleviate co-worker fears and misconceptions and provide information about accommodation.
- Increase outreach efforts so that vendors are aware of agencies' programs and services such as support around accommodation. Willingness to hire is influenced by knowing supports are in place.
- Insure outreach is based on knowledge of employers including core competencies required for available jobs, the work environment, and knowledge about the industry's recent trends.