

Employment Support – early study findings

In 2018 we invited a group of people to take part in a study to help us set up an IPS Employment Support service at Waitematā DHB.

What was the study about?

Getting into work is a goal for many people who are coping with mental health issues. Finding a job can be hard and support to find work can help.

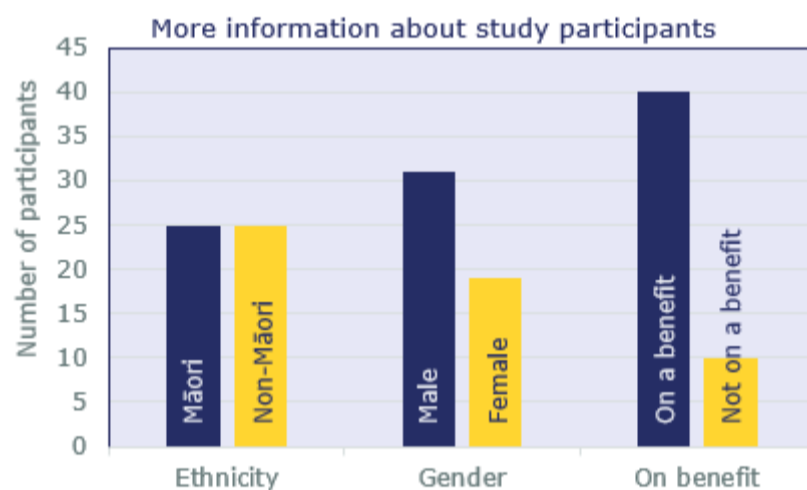
We wanted to try out a new employment support service based on an approach that has worked well internationally (IPS). IPS integrates employment support with mental health care. We wanted to start out small to make sure we got it right. The study helped us do this.

About the first 50 people

Those eligible for referral to the service were people aged 18-35 who said they wanted to work but were unemployed, at risk of losing their job, or were receiving a benefit. People aged 36 years and older were offered existing employment support services.

Two-thirds of the participants had been out of work for a year or more, and just over half (28 people) had a diagnosis associated with psychosis (schizophrenia, psychotic disorder or drug-induced psychosis).

Of the 50 participants, 43 were able to be followed for a full three months from entry when study data were collected and 32 remained in the service at the three-month mark.



Many people got jobs in the short period of the study

Within three months of agreeing to participate, **37 percent of participants had found work**. This compares well with an international benchmark of 43 percent entering employment after a follow-up of at least a year.

We can't say whether job starts were better than they would have been in the absence of IPS Employment Support, but we hope to answer this question as we move forward.

What is happening now?

A bigger study got underway in 2019 with changes that respond to these study findings, and build on the successes and what we learned. We discovered that there was widespread discomfort among mental health teams about limiting access to 18-35 year olds and the age restriction has now been removed.

"There are so many people over 35 who want to find work. And there is no alternative service for them...that is integrated like IPS."

Where you can find out more

[Read the full report available online.](#)

Some thank you's from the study team

Special thanks to the people who have agreed to participate in the studies and to allow anonymous information about their experiences to help us develop the service.

We are also grateful to members of the Waitemata DHB, Workwise, and MSD teams who helped develop and deliver the service, and to the many people who helped with the study.

Feedback from mental health teams was overwhelmingly positive

Mental health teams saw the service as a success and thought it had positive effects on the people who participated.

The service was seen as aligning well with a kaupapa Māori approach to mental health service delivery, but mental health team members wanted to know more about effectiveness for Māori.

Many people said the focus on employment had a positive impact on the culture of the mental health teams.

They explained that the service caused a shift towards a more holistic understanding of the health and wellbeing of the people they served, and an increased focus on strengths and successful outcomes.

One senior clinician described the service as:

"one of the most positive things I've seen."

Another said:

"The results of the project show that given the right opportunity and support, individuals with mental illness are able to recover from an episode or period of illness and return to the workforce..."

However, some team members wanted greater consideration to be given to the time and resources needed to implement a service like this, especially where implementation needed to be in line with the tikanga of a cultural service.

The need for workforce development to support cultural capability was also highlighted.

Reviewers who are experts in employment support made useful recommendations

Reviewers commented on the success in implementing many elements of a high-quality service in a short period of time.

They reported the service was doing well to link mental health care with work support, and achieving a wide range of jobs for people.

Recommendations for improvements included:

- reminders for mental health practitioners to discuss employment aspirations, experiences and interests with people, and making sure that clients interested in work had access to the service
- ensuring there is more regular, face-to-face support for those who find jobs
- increasing the amount of time employment consultants spend in the community and visiting employers to talk about job openings.