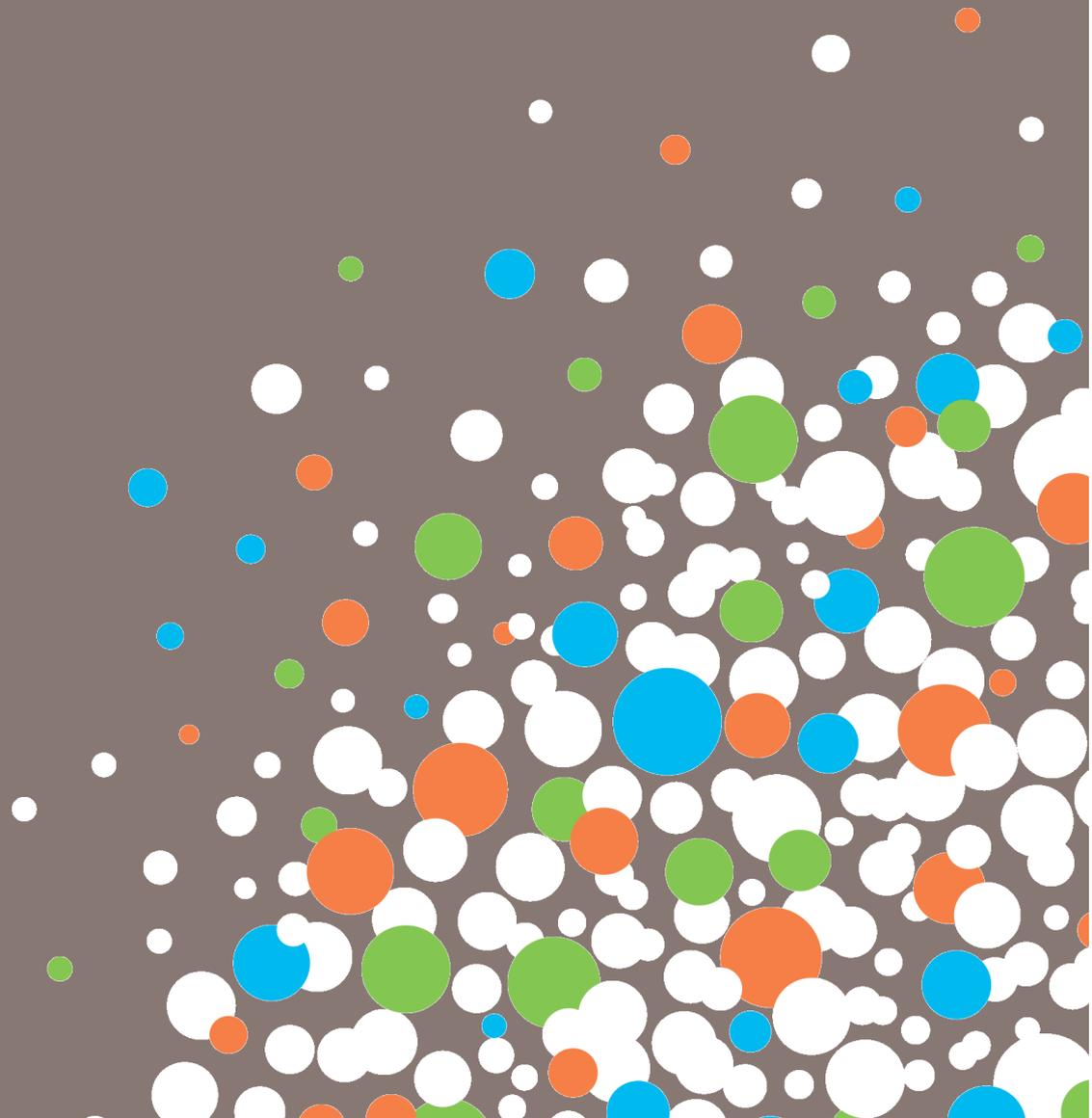




The National Centre of Excellence
in Youth Mental Health

Talk the Talk and Walk the Walk

Vocational Peer Work in Youth Mental Health



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Supporting a healthy jump from study to work

Prepared and submitted by: Gina Chinnery, June 2018

Orygen, The National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health is the world's leading research and knowledge translation organisation focusing on mental ill-health in young people.

At Orygen, our leadership and staff work to deliver cutting-edge research, policy development, innovative clinical services, and evidence-based training and education to ensure that there is continuous improvement in the treatments and care provided to young people experiencing mental ill-health.

Our work has created a new, more positive approach to the prevention and treatment of mental disorders, and has developed new models of care for young people with emerging disorders. This work has been translated into a worldwide shift in services and treatments to include a primary focus on getting well and staying well, and health care models that include partnership with young people and families.

Orygen has been integral to influencing change to vocational support services available to young people with mental ill-health in Australia. Many mental health disorders develop between the ages of 15 – 25 years, a time when many young people are also transitioning between education and employment and starting out on their career journey. Research has found that early vocational support can have a significant effect on the long-term vocational outcomes of people experiencing mental illness.

Young people who experience mental ill health are approximately three times more likely to suffer disruption to their education and work life than their peers. Providing appropriate support is essential to minimising the negative impact on long-term vocational outcomes.

The Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) is the most evidence-based and effective form of employment support for people experiencing serious mental illness. IPS supports people with severe mental health difficulties into employment and involves intensive, individualised support, a rapid job search followed by placement into paid employment, and time-unlimited support for both the employee and the employer.

IPS has 8 core principles:

1. Focus on competitive employment
2. Zero exclusion criteria. Open to all that want work
3. Rapid job search approach
4. Vocational specialists are integrated with mental health teams

5. Participants are provided with benefits planning
6. Time unlimited and individualised support
7. Services align with individual employment preferences
8. Employment specialists develop relationships with employers that align to participant work preferences

Twenty-four randomised controlled trials of IPS worldwide have shown a significant improvement in vocational outcomes for clients, including the first IPS trial undertaken with a youth cohort at Orygen Youth Health in Melbourne. On the strength of this evidence, the Australian Government has funded a three-year national trial of the IPS model in 14 headspace centres across the country.

Youth vocational peer workers

Orygen has embedded IPS in their headspace clinical services (located in North West Melbourne) and enhanced this model through the inclusion of youth vocational peer workers. Youth vocational peer workers work collaboratively with the vocational specialists to provide emotional and social support to others. They do this from the perspective of a peer with lived experience of mental ill health, incorporating their own experiences of work and/or study.

In the employment context, this can include supports such as talking about disclosing their mental health with employers or developing strategies with young people to manage their mental health when balancing work and study.

Vocational peer support can include:

- Promoting the vocational program to young people and clinical staff.
- Assisting young people to attend Centrelink appointments, job interviews and other practical activities that support engagement in work or study.
- Coordinating and co-facilitating vocationally focussed groups.
- Providing pre-employment and post placement support from a peer perspective.

Benefits of vocational peer support:

- Can increase young people's engagement and participation in vocational programs and other supports offered by the clinical service.
- Creates an entry-level career opportunity for young people interested in working in the mental health sector.
- Assists staff understand specific issues faced by their client group and therefore provide more individualised and targeted vocational supports.

YOTES

Orygen has also recently introduced a trial of a moderated online vocational platform, YOTES, to provide additional online career support, and peer support, to young people with mental ill-health via a web-based application. Many of the young people participating in the YOTES trial are also active or past participants in Orygen's IPS vocational programs.

YOTES is designed to support young people to access expert career advice, connect with peers, navigate career options and build career confidence. A team of online career specialists and

youth peer workers assist users through social networking, group facilitation and interactive activities available on the system.

Benefits of YOTES:

- YOTES can support young people at any stage of their career journey by providing an alternative for young people deemed not eligible for government funded employment programs.
- Connects young people with other young people in a safe and supportive online setting to share their experiences of gaining work or study.
- Able to reach people in remote and regional areas or those with disabilities or illnesses that can make travelling to in-person supports difficult.
- Users can develop digital literacy; career management and job seeking skills at their own pace and track their progress in the system.

Conclusion

IPS is a highly successful model of employment support but the employment landscape in Australia has changed significantly since IPS was developed in the US over 20 years ago. Our research seeks to enhance the IPS model and other vocational programs by introducing vocational peer support roles and developing innovative online platforms that support young people with mental ill-health in their transition from education to employment.



Gina Chinnery

Gina Chinnery, National Vocational Manager at Orygen, has extensive experience implementing vocational support programs for young people with mental ill health and in training and supervising vocational workers to do the same. Gina was the 2015 Career Development Association of Australia (CDA) Career Practitioner of the Year and the 2015 Long Term Unemployment Conference's Employment Officer of the Year.