

Toolkit to help those with psychiatric disabilities reach educational goals

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(Medical Xpress) -- All too often, when individuals experience a mental health impairment, it derails their education. Researchers at the Office of Mental Health Research and Training at the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare have released a new iteration of a toolkit designed to help mental health agencies support these individuals in the quest to achieve their educational goals.

The Supported [Education](#) Toolkit 3.0 provides measures for mental [health agencies](#) to evaluate their programs' effectiveness, and it offers specific tools for both fidelity reviewers and implementation sites that can be individually tailored to help people who have been hospitalized because of mental health conditions such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or severe depression.

"People in these cases have often had their first psychotic break in late high school or college and had their education put on hold," said Trevor Manthey, a KU doctoral student and one of the lead developers of the toolkit. "Often, just thinking about renewing their education can bring back those negative associations."

Supported education is a practice in mental health to provide individuals who have experienced psychiatric disabilities with the personal and environmental support they need to be able to focus on completing their educational goals. The aim is to help enable people to overcome their disabilities and live a meaningful, dignified and productive life. A good deal of research has highlighted the importance of education in mental

health recovery.

The new toolkit will help mental health agencies design recovery plans for individuals. No two cases are exactly alike, and the plans can be tailored to each individual. It also provides specific measures to evaluate and grade their programs and determine areas that may need improvement.

“The nice thing about what we’ve created is it’s flexible,” Manthey said. “You can combine it with other tools such as supported employment, or overall mental health recovery or something else entirely, depending on what their goals are.”

Individuals who experience a psychiatric disability and do not finish their education may be relegated to low-income jobs and living in poverty. Others often are not employed, and it is not uncommon for dependence on government support programs to be the result. One of the goals of the Supported Education Toolkit is to help individuals gain financial independence by finishing their education and subsequently acquire long-term gainful employment.

The toolkit will be made available for download online for mental health agencies across the country. Professionals in Australia and Canada are studying the toolkit to determine if they can implement it in their countries.

KU researchers have studied the first two iterations of the [toolkit](#) and will continue to evaluate the third. These researchers have conducted interviews with [mental health](#) professionals and individuals who have experienced psychiatric disabilities both in Kansas and across the nation. They are also examining the experiences of individuals who have put their education on hold. They are working with two groups: those who are going back to school and others who say they are done for good.

Nearly all report facing discrimination or negative incidents because of their disability, whether it is a loss of friends or judgment from teachers. The goal is to better understand their experiences and continue to improve supported education programs.

Manthey, a native of Sequim, Wash., worked as a therapist before coming to KU to earn his doctorate. He's seen individuals who said they never thought they'd go back or finish school achieve their goals with the assistance of Supported Education. He worked with KU School of [Social Welfare](#) faculty and staff members Rick Goscha, Melinda Coffman, Ally Mabry, Linda Carlson, Jennifer Davis and Charles Rapp.

"It's been a real pleasure to be involved in this," he said. "To name just a few, I've seen people who originally didn't finish their first year of college go on to get their degree. Others have finished high school or obtained their nursing certificate. It's very rewarding."

Provided by University of Kansas

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