

WHAT CAN COMMUNITY SUPPORT PROGRAMS DO TO PROMOTE PRODUCTIVITY?: PERSPECTIVES OF SERVICE USERS

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ABSTRACT

A major goal of community support programs is to help users of services lead meaningful, productive lives in the community. However, there is currently little evidence to support an understanding of how community support programs influence the productivity of service users, particularly from the perspective of consumers themselves. This qualitative study explored consumer perspectives on how community support programs promote productive activity. Data were obtained from in-depth interviews with a sample of 14 participants who received community support services, and analyzed using the constant comparative method involving unitizing, categorizing, and forming themes. The 4 themes that emerged from the data were: (a) the need for a specific focus on productivity within services, (b) the importance of consumer empowerment, (c) the need for learning opportunities, and (d) the value of supportive networks.

Paradigms in community mental health have shifted in the past decade, and fortunately, discourse within the field now addresses persons with severe mental illness as citizens who have the potential for full participation within our communities. As issues of quality of life, housing, productivity, and general well-being gain more attention, the number of community support programs continues to rise. The resulting growth of such programs over time has led to the development of various models, each with its own traditions and practices. Consequently, there is great variability in the delivery of community support services. Thus, there is a need for research aimed at discovering the critical components of community support programs that contribute to successful community reintegration (Barton, 1999).

To address this need, a project was conducted with the objective of creating measurement tools to evaluate the essential ingredients of community support programs. The project, entitled "Explaining Outcomes: Developing Instruments to Assess the Critical Characteristics of Community Support Programs for People with Severe Mental Illness," aimed to develop data collection instruments that are useful across a wide range of community support models and practices. These instruments have the potential to identify and evaluate critical ingredients of community support programs and thereby enhance service delivery to consumers. This large 5-year primary study led to the generation of the secondary study presented here, which explored how community support programs influence the productivity of consumers. This work represents an important contribution to our knowledge about community mental health service delivery and its relationship to productivity as it is based on perspectives of consumers of these services.

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A community support program is defined as any program that provides long-term individualized support for people living with a severe mental illness. In this project, community support programs are not defined in terms of their sponsorship, that is, whether administered by a hospital or community organization, but rather by their focus on community living and ongoing support. Examples of such programs include assertive community treatment teams, case management programs, housing programs, self-help programs and clubhouses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In general, community support programs have been established to help persons with severe mental illness become reintegrated into the community, and to improve their quality of life (Burns & Santos, 1995). Towards this end, the value of integrating consumer-oriented outcomes—outcomes concerned with the well-being of consumers—into program evaluation is being acknowledged (Herrman, 1999). Researchers and service providers are advocating for emphasis on outcomes that explore the functioning and community living of consumers (Brekke, Ansel, Long, Slade, & Weinstein, 1999; Fossey & Harvey, 2001). Often, these outcomes are defined by employment-related indicators. Indeed, a number of studies have used positive employment outcomes to validate the effectiveness of community support programs in improving functioning (D.R. Becker, Smith, Tanzman, Drake, & Tremblay, 2001; R.E. Becker, Meisler, Stormer, & Brondino, 1999; Cook et al., 2001; McFarlane et al., 2000). Such an emphasis on vocational outcomes is a positive and progressive shift within the field, as there is evidence of a direct link between employment and well-being. It has been shown that consumers' engagement in work activities has the power to improve mental health by enhancing self-concept and self-esteem (Arns & Linney, 1993; Strong, 1998). Also, consumers view joblessness as a detriment to quality of life (Mayers, 2000), and have expressed a strong desire to work (Hatfield, Huxley, & Mohamad, 1992; Lehman, 1995; Shepherd, Murray, & Muijen, 1994).

The study of gainful employment has provided valuable contributions to the literature, but there is evidence to suggest that other work-related outcomes such as education and parenting are also important to consumers, and that they too can promote well-being. For example, Westwood (2003) found that college attendance improved confidence, self-esteem, socialization, and motivation among mental health service users. Further evidence is presented by Eklund, Erlandsson, and Persson (2003), who reported that the occupational value linked to parenting is associated with higher levels of health and well-being. These non-vocational pursuits that are related to improved quality of life and self-actualization are also worthy of attention so as not to overlook the outcomes of consumers who have interests and goals other than employment.

A preferred construct for inquiry, therefore, is "productivity," as it is more inclusive in its scope than employment alone. Productivity is defined as "occupations that make an economic or social contribution or that provide for economic sustenance" (Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, 1997, p. 37). Thus, productivity includes paid employment but is not limited to this activity. The experience of productivity can include such activities as volunteer work, parenting, homemaking, and education, in addition to gainful employment (Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, 1997). Therefore, productivity is a concept that represents a variety of experiences, and is less likely to exclude the experiences of consumers who value and engage in productive activities beyond employment.

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In summary, there is evidence that suggests that productivity is linked to increased well-being, and that consumers are interested in enhancing their level of productivity in the community. Although some effort has been invested in exploring the relationship between consumer productivity and community support programs, the focus has largely been on evaluation of outcomes related to employment and for the most part has been conducted using quantitative, experimental methods. A clear understanding of the influence of community support on productivity, particularly from the perspectives of consumers, is lacking. The purpose of this paper is to examine the processes and interventions of community support programs that promote productivity, from the perspectives of users of these services.

METHOD

The full "Explaining Outcomes" study was a part of a large multi-site community mental health evaluation initiative (CMHEI) in Ontario. In the first phase of the Explaining Outcomes study, qualitative data were gathered from consumers, family members, and service providers regarding experiences with community mental health programs, emphasizing critical ingredients and characteristics of such programs. A subset of these data, the consumer data, was used in the secondary study presented here, to examine consumers' perceptions of how community support programs influence productivity. Qualitative research methods are particularly effective for this purpose because they are an appropriate foundation for studying the experiences of participants from their own point of view (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Furthermore, because qualitative data analysis is viewed as a powerful tool for exploring phenomena that are poorly understood (Miles & Huberman, 1994), its use is warranted in studying how community support programs influence the productivity of consumers from the perspective of consumers themselves.

Sample

Participants in this study were people who used the services of community support programs for people with severe mental illness in Ontario. A purposeful sampling strategy was used to yield a sample of participants with potentially diverse perspectives. Participants in the primary study were randomly selected from a list of service users of rural and urban community support program types that included: assertive community treatment, case management, housing support, clubhouse, and self-help programs. To participate in the study, consumers needed to fulfill the following inclusion criteria: (a) diagnosable severe mental illness, (b) experience with community support program(s) over a period of at least 2 years, and (c) the experience of one or more disabilities including: problems with activities of daily living, homelessness, unemployment, difficulty interacting with social networks, and the existence of co-morbid conditions such as substance abuse. The recruitment process resulted in a sample of 14 adult consumer participants, 7 male and 7 female, ranging in age from late twenties to mid-fifties. At the time of interview, 3 participants were receiving assertive community treatment, 2 were involved in case management programs, 1 was involved in a housing support program, 3 were connected to self-help programs, 2 were members of a clubhouse, and 3 used drop-in services.

Procedure and Instruments

Prior to recruitment for the primary study, ethical review and approval was obtained. Participants provided informed consent before engaging in a semi-structured interview. The interview guide, created by the researchers conducting the primary research project, consisted of several questions and probes aimed at allowing the participants to express their views regarding the strengths and weaknesses of community support programs. Examples were: "Please describe specific components of the program(s) that helped you most" and "Were there things missing from the program(s) that you think would have improved your life in the community?" The guide did not include specific questions about participants' experiences of productivity. The interview guide was tested in pilot interviews and was modified before use. It was explained to participants that the purpose of the research was to explore the essential ingredients of community support programs to determine how these ingredients affect the consumers of these programs. The interview was approximately one hour in length and was held at a location that was convenient for each participant. The project coordinator conducted the interviews, which were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim, with participant names and other identifying information eliminated. Pseudonyms were used to represent individual participants in all documents that emerged from the project. An additional ethical review was obtained for this secondary study on productivity.

Data Analysis

This study involved secondary analysis of the interview data from the primary project. Electronic files of the transcripts were created and entered into the NVivo qualitative software program used to manage the data analysis. The constant comparative method of analysis, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), was used to analyze the data. The analysis was carried out according to procedural guidelines (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) for unitizing, categorizing, and forming themes. This process of inductive analysis allowed categories of meaning to be derived from the data and further analyzed and organized into themes.

Efforts were made to ensure the study's trustworthiness by meeting the recommended criteria for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility, or the degree to which the multiple realities of participants are clearly represented, was maintained through peer debriefing. The primary author reviewed the analytic process with a "disinterested peer" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 308) to probe potential biases, explore meanings of the data, and clarify the basis for interpretation. Transferability, the applicability of the research findings to other contexts or settings, was supported by the use of a purposeful sampling strategy with a description of sample characteristics. Dependability, the consistency of the analysis process, was upheld through an inquiry audit performed by a seasoned qualitative researcher in which divergent understandings of the data were processed and analyzed. Brannen (1992) recommends the sharing and processing of perspectives brought forward by multiple investigators as a form of triangulation. Confirmability, the extent to which research findings are grounded in the data, was met by using a reflexive journal throughout the process of analysis.

RESULTS

Results from the data analysis are presented in four major themes: (a) the need for a specific focus on productivity within services, (b) the importance of consumer

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empowerment, (c) the need for learning opportunities, and (d) the value of supportive networks. The following discussion presents each theme and the categories that it comprises. Supporting data from which the categories emerged are provided and relationships to relevant literature are highlighted.

A Specific Focus on Productivity within Services

Several participants expressed the importance of being connected to community services that have a specific focus on productivity. Many suggested that existing mental health services be shifted to incorporate a productivity perspective by including activities or interventions that connect people to productive, meaningful activity. Consumers applauded efforts by service providers that were clearly and directly linked to productivity outcomes. They identified the ability to access and use these services as priorities in developing productive behaviours and activities. This theme comprises the following two categories: the need to integrate productivity into mental health programming and the importance of direct links to productive activity.

The need to integrate productivity into mental health programming. Some participants drew attention to the fact that services often fail to support the wishes of consumers who would like to increase their level of productivity. For example, Charles pointed out that service providers should be more focused on offering productivity-related services:

You would think that there would be help somewhere. You would think a government official would come down and say, "How come you guys aren't doing your jobs? I mean if these people are disabled, and they want to get out in the community and produce, why aren't you doing something about that, instead of sitting around, taking them out for coffee? Why don't you do something about it?"

Several participants expressed dissatisfaction with the existing level of access to productivity-focused services. Joan, for example, recognized that accessibility to productive activities is often limited by long waiting lists and suggested that the circumstances could be improved if community support programs offered additional resources for productivity:

Just in general I think they could have been more helpful if there were more job opportunities in the community. They did have a program, but there just were not enough positions to accommodate everybody that was interested in employment and there was a waiting list and you had to wait. But I still think if there were more opportunities, they could have helped more people.

Other participants expressed a concern regarding limited financial resources in the community. Betty explained how difficult it was to maintain her desired level of productivity as a result of having to fund her own endeavours:

My poetry I get published in little magazines, but we're having to foot the bill, to put out a little magazine. We're having to come up with \$77 to do that.

Brenda described a volunteer job that involved problem-solving with others on how funds could be raised so that productive opportunities could be expanded to include more consumers:

I belong to three groups . . . and all they talk about is mental health. How we can improve it for the consumer, and how we can build up the restaurant bit and get more money and so that we can hire more people?

There was a shared perception that programs could and should sharpen their focus on productivity-related initiatives. Part of this problem was attributed to funding: It was perceived that a lack of adequate funds within community support programs com-

promises accessibility to services that have the potential to promote productivity, and that with increased funding, community support services could enable more consumers to engage in productive activity.

The importance of direct links to productive activity. Several participants communicated the value of working with service providers who linked them directly to productive activity. The following statement from one participant illustrates how service providers can promote the productivity of consumers by offering opportunities to engage in productive activities such as volunteering:

They asked me to be on a board of directors and it did a lot for me. I was real shy and . . . they'd have to ask me "What do you think?" and what I said was accepted. My self-esteem, my self-confidence has come back in a way that I never had. The next thing you know I was doing things that I never thought I could do . . . I started getting on committees.

Tom, who was able to continue his education because of links made by service providers, shared a similar experience:

They got me into college, just by suggesting that I try it. I thought I'd end up dropping out or I wouldn't be able to hack it, but . . . it really worked out well.

The sentiments of the participants are supported by the work of Brown, Durand Thomas, and Allen (1994) who reported that consumers perceived their engagement in work and work-related activity to be limited by a lack of employment or vocational programs available in the community. Others have recognized accessibility as a critical ingredient of community support (Linney, Arns, Chinman, & Frank, 1995; Mowbray & Tan, 1993; Pyke, Morris, Rabin, & Sabriye, 2001). Programs which have converted traditional services into productivity-oriented services have shown promising outcomes: D.R. Becker et al. (2001) report improved employment rates when day treatment programs were converted into supported employment programs. With the development and transformation of services into those that directly support productive activity, community support programs will be better able to promote the productivity of as many consumers as possible.

The Importance of Consumer Empowerment

Analysis of the data revealed that participants strongly valued experiences of empowerment in connection with developing their productive potential. The findings demonstrate that the following two categories are fundamental to the experience of consumer empowerment as it relates to productivity: making choices, and exerting and maintaining control.

Making choices. Participants looked favourably on opportunities to choose among various options for productivity. Richard, for example, described how having choices allowed him and other consumers to engage in a variety of productive activities:

You could work half of what they call a shift . . . You'd do regular work like you would in a little convenience store . . . or a coffee joint or something . . . or clean the toilets. You chose whatever you wanted to do.

Joan described a similar experience with a community support program that provided a variety of productive opportunities to choose from:

With the clubhouse model, you have the workday, and there's certain things that you do in the day, like in the clubhouse there was a clerical unit which worked with computers and typewriters and then there was the kitchen, and so each day, you would join whichever one that you wanted or felt more interested in.

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As with all individuals, the productive interests of consumers vary from one to another. Participation in productive activity is enhanced when consumers are given opportunities to choose activities that reflect their unique interests. Tom expressed his approval of service providers who encouraged consumers to choose a productive activity based on personal interest:

Obviously they can't advise you too closely because it is your life, but they try and motivate you and see if there's something you're interested in that you wanted to do. If you wanted to take a course, do you want to work, that sort of thing . . . which is really great.

Clearly, service providers and community support programs can facilitate engagement in productive activity by presenting a variety of options to consumers and helping them develop options of their own. The literature supports the notion that opportunities to make choices concerning actions and services can result in a sense of empowerment for consumers (Nelson, Lord, & Ochocka, 2001), which in turn positively influences their engagement in productive activity. Bozzer, Samsom, and Anson (1999) recommend that consumers developing their vocational potential be offered a range of programs with a variety of approaches so that choice, an important consideration in job satisfaction, is offered. Direct evidence to support the positive influence of choice was reported by D.R. Becker, Drake, Farabaugh, and Bond (1996), who found that consumers who obtained competitive employment that matched their job preferences were more likely to experience job satisfaction and tenure than those who worked in nonpreferred positions. A later replication study however, failed to report the same encouraging results (D.R. Becker, Bebout, & Drake, 1998).

Exerting and maintaining control. Several participants expressed feelings of frustration as a result of having to fight for personal control over productivity. Betty described an experience in which her control over the pursuit of productivity was challenged:

For a year we met once every 2 or 3 weeks to try to set up a consumer/survivor business. But then the family service centre invited all these bigwigs that weren't consumer/survivors. They really took it out of consumers' hands, you know. We wanted it to be a consumer-run business but they pulled the rug right out from underneath us. They took our idea away from us, and we just had to disband.

Charles described a similarly discouraging situation when his power to exert control over personal productivity was compromised by a service provider:

She goes out to job employers to set people up. I said to her, "I'm not very happy at this point. No one's trusting me to go out on a job placement." And she said, "Well I'll put you out there when I think you're ready." And my response is, "I think I'm ready now." She said, "Well I don't feel that way."

Evidently, when the opportunity to exert control over personal productivity is challenged, the likelihood of engagement is adversely affected. In the absence of control, consumer empowerment is compromised. As Rappaport (1987) pointed out, control is a necessary component of empowerment, and without it "people cannot achieve their fullest health potential" (World Health Organization, Health and Welfare Canada, & Canadian Public Health Organization, 1986, p.1). Therefore, if consumers are to remain healthy and productive in the community, control over personal productivity is essential.

Through analysis of the interview data, the theme of consumer empowerment emerged as an important factor for promoting productivity in this study. A similar relationship was noted by Kirsh (1996), who identified personal empowerment as a

critical factor in influencing the work reintegration of consumers. Additional research has shown that when service users of community support programs feel empowered, they are more likely to indicate that their needs are met and report more positive mental health outcomes (Roth & Crane-Ross, 2002).

The Need for Learning Opportunities

Several participants expressed the importance of opportunities for learning and described the influence that these opportunities have had on productivity. This theme is discussed in the following three categories: building cognitive skills to support future productivity, hands-on skills training for productive activities, and environments conducive to learning.

Building cognitive skills to support future productivity. Richard described how he received services that focused on improving concentration skills in anticipation of a future vocation:

I had seven half-hour sessions . . . on concentration. My therapist said, "So that if you ever started working again or something like that, you would not have the habit of having to go into some kind of fantasy land or some abstract world."

Tom discussed how his involvement with service providers prepared him for continuing education by stating: "I had to learn to focus before I went to college and . . . they helped me with that."

On the basis of a review of the literature, Barton (1999) reported that services directed at cognitive skill remediation show promising results for improving basic information processing abilities such as attention, concentration, and memory, which are critical to the acquisition of other skills related to functional improvement. Therefore, by providing services and resources for cognitive skill building, community support programs can help prepare consumers for future engagement in productive activity.

Hands-on skills training for productive activities. According to several participants, the opportunity for hands-on training was a valuable way of facilitating engagement in productive activity. Brenda expressed her appreciation for a community support program that offered hands-on training for building business management skills:

I took a course, and it taught us how to manage our own business and it helped. There were nine of us . . . We worked together on our business plans, and we worked together on our marketing schemes and . . . it was good for us.

Through hands-on training, consumers were able to practise various productive activities with the assistance of others who could offer guidance and facilitate skill development. Joan viewed this as a way of building skills that can be later managed independently for future productivity:

Thursdays we have a lunch that we prepare . . . We get help with life skills like preparing the food, and cleaning up. That way if any of us were to be on our own . . . we would have those skills with us.

To date, very little research has been directed at evaluating the effectiveness of skills training within community settings, particularly in relation to productivity (Dilk & Bond, 1996). Some studies suggest that an emphasis on training in living skills which incorporates problem-solving and group approaches has had a positive impact on vocational outcomes (Bozzer et al., 1999; McFarlane et al., 2000).

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Environments conducive to learning. Many participants pointed out that the nature of learning environments is as important as the tasks themselves. Joan described how the environment of one particular day program allowed her to build skills related to educational activity:

It was definitely a learning atmosphere. You were in classes and . . . there was an instructor there and, um, and it was almost like one big conference because you were taking notes and you had, um, pamphlets and binders and that kind of thing. So it was definitely like a school atmosphere.

Diane explained how being in an environment with the appropriate physical resources enabled her engagement in productive skill building:

It was great. You'd learn housekeeping. They were really good teachers and they had great equipment there. Not industrial mops but mops that everyday people would use. People who clean their house.

Charles expressed frustration with not being in an environment that supported his interest in learning additional productive activities:

I mean if someone around here were willing to give me a shot, I mean I can write things down . . . I can answer the phone . . . The only thing I don't have is typing and computer . . . but I could learn.

Clearly, participants value environments that support the development of productive skills. Such environments have the physical and human resources that facilitate learning, such as supportive mentors or instructors and usable tools. By creating environments that support consumer learning, community support programs have the potential to promote productivity for service users.

The Value of Supportive Networks

Analysis of the data revealed that several participants valued the experience of supportive relationships as a means of promoting various productive activities. This theme emerged through the identification of the following two categories: peer support and supportive relationships with service providers.

Peer support. Through involvement with community support programs, consumers have the opportunity to develop supportive relationships with other consumers. Several participants expressed satisfaction with the opportunity to work collaboratively with other consumers on productive activities. For example, Chris stated:

I liked it 'cause you know you do things together, like go shopping, and grocery shopping, and take turns cooking dinner. And, um, cleaning up and different chores.

Joan explained how peer support was an opportunity for her to engage in the productive activity of volunteering, and allowed her to facilitate the development of supportive networks for other consumers:

I volunteer as a peer support worker . . . and well I think it helps them, because I'm there and I'm someone who is also . . . a consumer/survivor, and I can relate with them, on certain levels, that many other people couldn't. I understand where they're coming from. I can help them out a little bit.

Tom reiterated the value of peer support:

They want peer support workers and I'm feeling better enough that I keep thinking maybe I could give that a swing. And so I get to talk to people and . . . I've had psychiatric difficulties myself, so I can identify with people, you know, maybe there's some people that are in a worse state than I that I can help.

Whether formally established as part of community support program services, or informally obtained through interactions between consumers, peer support has been positively regarded by consumers (Mead & Copeland, 2000; Mead, Hilton, & Curtis, 2001). Research also suggests that the vocational productivity of consumers can be promoted by peer support workers who are trained in mental health and vocational service delivery (Reed & Merz, 2000).

Supportive relationships with service providers. Analysis of the data showed that supportive service providers can enable consumers to engage in productive activities. Diane described how the support of service providers facilitated engagement in homemaking:

They don't just say 'Here, cook' . . . they help us cook. Knowing that there's support makes me feel better.

Joan explained how supportive relationships with service providers gave her encouragement to pursue employment:

I just really felt like they believed in me, like they knew that I could do it and that was very important because I had a lot of doubts about myself, and they were constantly there to support me, and say "You can do this" and they weren't pushy but, um, were supporting you regardless of what happens.

These findings suggest that consumer productivity can be positively influenced by the perception that service providers are supportive. Although there is a paucity of research examining support from the perspective of consumers, there is reason to believe that a supportive relationship is influential in the productive lives of service users. Cook and Rosenberg (1993) found that continued support from a job counsellor was a strong predictor of employment, and Donnell, Lustig, and Strauser (2002) found similar results. Collins, Mowbray, and Bybee (2000) reported that consumers were more likely to engage in education and paid employment activities if they had large social networks (including service providers) and had frequent contact with their social network.

DISCUSSION

This study explored the elements of community support programs that promote productivity from the perspectives of consumers. Four themes emerged from qualitative data analysis: (a) the need for a specific focus on productivity within services, (b) the importance of consumer empowerment, (c) the need for learning opportunities, and (d) the value of supportive networks. These themes reflect those aspects of community support service delivery that the consumers of such services value.

A number of limitations of this research must be pointed out. Participants in this study represent a variety of experiences with different community support services, but the number and types of services represented in this work do not cover the full spectrum of options and opportunities in community mental health. Accordingly, findings may resonate with some support services to a greater extent than others. The sample size is small, as is often the case in qualitative research, and the realities of informants are multiple and diverse (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, although the findings generated from this study provide some insight into the experiences of consumers who use the services of community support programs, caution must be used in applying the findings of this study broadly. While promoting productivity (as defined by this paper) is, or could be, a core function for most community support services, there may be some programs that feel this goal falls outside their mandate. This issue of whether an emphasis on productivity is an essential component of all

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types of services is a question for the field to debate. However, given the findings of this paper, as well as literature pointing to relationships between productivity, health, and self esteem, the issue of promoting productivity has relevance to most mental health services working with consumers whose opportunities to contribute to society in meaningful ways have been limited.

The findings generated from this study offer valuable insights into how community support programs can influence the productivity of consumers. A key finding is the need for programs to sharpen their focus on productivity, perhaps by shifting traditional programming to interventions that create linkages between people and productive activity, and fostering environments and opportunities conducive to learning. Seebohm and Secker (2003) have claimed that despite increasing interest in productivity, surveys in Britain suggest that progress in supporting clients' vocational aspirations has been slow. Although the authors are referring to paid employment, attending to the productivity needs of consumers is a wider issue and efforts need to be intensified. Other findings confirm the benefits of empowering and supportive relationships, concepts which have been explored in community mental health but are increasingly difficult to advance in the current climate of restraint and evidence-based practice. It benefits service providers and consumers alike to note that improvements in productivity are far more likely under conditions of support, choice, empowerment, and hope.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The experiences and opinions expressed by the participants have illuminated those elements of community support services that have the potential to promote productivity. With the hope of realizing this potential, it is suggested that the findings from this study be integrated into program planning and evaluation, as well as service delivery. A number of recommendations follow, based on the research findings. Some of these recommendations will be more easily incorporated into programs and services than others, depending on a program's mission, operational goals, and model of service delivery. However, as community support programs embrace a holistic approach to service delivery, and as the recommendations below are neither model-bound nor mandate-bound, they are relevant to most, if not all, community support programs. It is recommended that community programs give due consideration to:

- *providing productivity-focused services.* A shift from traditional mental health services to interventions that directly promote productivity, including direct linkages to productive activity, should be considered. A number of examples within the literature demonstrate such shifts from traditional mental health services to productivity-oriented ones, and the results have largely been positive (see, for example, D.R. Becker et al., 2001; Krupa, Lagarde, & Carmichael, 2003). There are also examples in which focused services such as housing have broadened their emphasis to include greater awareness of and emphasis on productivity as an essential component of community integration (Cook et al., 2001).
- *improving accessibility to these services by advocating for increased funding, or transferring funds to productivity-directed services.* As an example, some programs have obtained additional funds or transformed existing staff positions into ones that specifically address productivity, such as vocational specialists on ACT teams (Blankertz & Robinson, 1996).

- *developing consumer empowerment by encouraging service users to make choices and experience control over service and resource options.* A range of work, volunteer, and educational options should be extended to consumers so that interests, skills, and preferred ways of working can be matched with engagement in productive activity.
- *creating opportunities for continued learning by including resources for building cognitive skills, providing hands-on training for productive skills, and creating environments that are conducive to learning.* Offering in-vivo experiences, providing stepwise training in sets of activities that constitute a job or role (for example, "student"), reinforcing the acquisition of new skills, and mentoring or modelling new behaviours are strategies that enable skill development and success as foundations for productive roles.
- *fostering the development and maintenance of supportive networks for consumers.* This can be done by providing opportunities for peer support and offering consumers encouragement and a positive, supportive relationship. Literature in the area of recovery addresses ways in which community mental health programs can embrace hope, optimism, and expectations (Hoffman, Kupper, & Kunz, 2000; Jacobson & Greenley, 2001; Mead & Copeland, 2000).

Additional research is warranted to determine whether interventions and characteristics of programs described here are associated with positive productivity outcomes and the degree to which each contributes to these outcomes. Further research is also needed to broaden our understanding of consumers' experiences and opinions related to productivity. Additional investment in the evaluation of community support programs will permit researchers to continue to appraise the qualities of services that promote productivity for consumers. With continued research in these areas, greater insight will be gained into how productivity can be promoted through community support programs.

RÉSUMÉ

L'un des principaux objectifs des services de soutien communautaires consiste à aider les usagers et les usagères à se forger une existence significative et productive au sein de la communauté. Cependant, il existe bien peu de recherches qui peuvent aider à comprendre l'influence des programmes de soutien sur la productivité des bénéficiaires de ces programmes, notamment telle que perçue par les usagers et les usagères mêmes. Cette étude qualitative présente le point de vue des usagers et des usagères quant aux façons dont les programmes de soutien communautaire favorisent l'activité productive. Les données ont été recueillies au cours d'entrevues en profondeur avec un échantillon de 14 personnes bénéficiaires de programmes de soutien communautaires. Ces données ont été analysées selon la méthode comparative constante incluant la division en unités, la catégorisation et la définition de thèmes. Les 4 thèmes qui se sont dégagés des données recueillies sont les suivants: (a) le besoin de mettre spécifiquement l'accent sur la productivité dans les services; (b) l'importance du pouvoir d'agir des usagers et des usagères; (c) le besoin de créer des occasions d'apprentissage, et (d) la valeur des réseaux de soutien.

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