

# Supporting Prosumer Employment: Results From an Ethnography of Two Ontario Community Mental Health Organizations

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## ABSTRACT

This paper describes an ethnographic study exploring the employment of consumer-survivors at 2 Ontario community mental health organizations. The methodology included interviews with agency staff, participant observation, and document analysis to examine the natural environment of the employees at the 2 organizations and the ways in which the organizations supported the employment of consumer-survivors. The themes identified uncover some of the strategies these organizations use to support consumer-survivor employees: (a) create the context for consumer-survivor employment, (b) encourage autonomy, (c) provide a supportive atmosphere, and (d) set up consumer-survivors for success. These themes lead to specific recommendations related to hiring processes, working conditions, and attitudes.

It has long been accepted practice to employ those who have received services in fields of helping related to hearing impairment, HIV, substance abuse, and spinal cord injuries. It is, however, a newer development in the field of mental health (Carlson, Rapp, & McDiarmid, 2001; Solomon & Draine, 1998; Zipple et al., 1997). Including consumer-survivors in mental health service provision is, by some accounts, becoming a more accepted and common practice (Carlson et al., 2001; Chinman, Rosenheck, Lam, & Davidson, 2000; Solomon, 2004). This paper reports on research exploring this phenomenon: the employment in Ontario

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community mental health organizations of those who use or have used mental health services (referred to here as prosumers,<sup>1</sup> a blend of the words provider/professional and consumer). Specifically, in this paper the focus is on the ways in which two Ontario organizations are successful at employing prosumers.

### CONSUMER-SURVIVORS AS SERVICE PROVIDERS

Mowbray and Moxley (1997, p. 37) categorized prosumer positions according to whether consumer-survivors or non-consumers were in control of the service and whether the aim was mutual support or service provision. Their study was conducted with “consumers as employees” (service provision in an agency controlled by those who are not consumers). Dixon, Hackman, and Lehman (1997) and Solomon and Draine (1998) further refined this category to note that consumers as employees can be found within non-designated roles (positions not created solely for consumer-survivors) and within designated roles (positions created specifically for consumer-survivors, sometimes referred to as peer specialists). Zipple and colleagues (1997) described this as the difference between “consumer as staff member and the creation of ‘consumer slots’” (p. 408), arguing that broadening consumer-survivor employment from “slots” creates greater integration and meaningful opportunities for promotion.

Solomon (2004) pointed out, in a review of the prosumer literature, that the results from outcome studies suggested either that there is no difference in outcome between those supported by prosumers and other employees, or that those supported by prosumers have better outcomes (Chinman et al., 2000; Clarke et al., 2000; Solomon & Draine, 1995). Studies have also suggested that employing a prosumer in the role of peer support specialist alongside employees who are not prosumers adds to the overall effectiveness of services (Doherty, Craig, Attafua, Boocock, & Jamieson-Craig, 2004; Felton et al., 1995; Klein, Cnaan, & Whitecraft, 1998).

White, Whelan, Barnes, and Baskerville (2003), in the only identified Canadian study regarding prosumers, noted that, in Ontario, Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams are required to employ at least a half-time prosumer. In their study, 88% of Ontario ACT teams reported that they either did employ or were planning to employ a prosumer.

### Supporting Prosumer Employment

Chinman, Young, Hassell, and Davidson’s (2006) dialogue with mental health system stakeholders underlined the importance of an organization’s commitment to valuing employees’ personal experiences with the mental health system and to providing close supervision of prosumers. Apart from these suggestions, there is little concrete information in the literature about ways to support prosumer employment. Most suggestions are authors’ recommendations responding to the challenges of employing prosumers as mentioned by research participants and can be categorized as either accommodations or training and supervision.

**Accommodations.** The need for accommodations has been cited as a challenge for organizations employing prosumers (Fishbein, Manos, & Rotteveel, 1995; Mowbray, 1997), although Davidson, Weingarten, Steiner, Stayner, and Hoge (1997) suggested that providing a more flexible workplace may be beneficial for all employees. The most common accommodations recommended are a more flexible work schedule allowing time for appointments and for sick leave (Doherty et al., 2004; Paulson et al., 1999) and more

supervision time (Besio & Mahler, 1993; Doherty et al., 2004; Mowbray, 1997; Paulson et al., 1999). Studies have found, though, that the need for supervision decreases as the period of employment increases (Besio & Mahler, 1993; Mowbray et al., 1996). Regarding absences, it may be necessary for employers to consider having extra staff available to cover as needed (Paulson et al., 1999).

**Training and supervision.** Some authors (e.g., Davidson et al., 1997; Mowbray, 1997; Solomon & Draine, 1998) discussed the challenges faced by prosumers and their co-workers in adapting to new roles as colleagues. Suggestions for facilitating this adjustment have included a strong and credible supervisor who is able to help both prosumers and other employees work through challenges (e.g., Carlson et al., 2001; Mowbray et al., 1996; Solomon & Draine, 1998; Zippel et al., 1997) and, for prosumers, possible isolation (Carlson et al., 2001). To reduce isolation, some programs maintain prosumer peer support groups (Davidson et al., 1997; Dixon et al., 1997), although some prosumers told Davidson and colleagues (1997) that this felt like another form of segregation.

While the above discussion highlights some possible ways to support prosumer employment, there is a lack of research investigating the strategies used by organizations that are successful at employing prosumers. This study addresses this gap by exploring the strategies used by two Ontario organizations successfully employing prosumers.

## THE RESEARCH PROJECT

The study formed part of a project exploring the participation, and particularly employment, of consumer-survivors in Ontario community mental health organizations. In the first phase of the project, the patterns of participation at Ontario community mental health organizations were explored through a survey (Grant, 2007). On the basis of the survey results, two organizations with high prevalence of consumer-survivor participation, especially in employment, were identified and studied in depth to understand their strategies for employing prosumers. The project was approved by the Research Ethics Board at Wilfrid Laurier University.

The general question guiding this entire project was: What are the supports and constraints for the employment of consumer-survivors in community mental health organizations? The specific question relevant to the portion of the project reported here was: How do organizations encourage and support prosumer employment?

This project used an ethnographic design. Studying participants in their natural settings (Brewer, 2000, 2004) and performing regular activities (Brewer, 2000, 2004; Creswell, 1998), ethnographers ask the general question, "What is going on here?" (Morse & Richards, 2002). Employees of the two organizations were studied as they conducted their regular workday activities.

## METHODS

This project used interviews, participant observation, and document analysis to attempt to understand the natural environment of the employees at the two organizations and, especially cogent to this paper, the ways in which the two organizations supported prosumer employment. The investigator worked with an Advisory Committee of prosumers who responded to the research plan, data collection, and data analysis.

## Sampling

From the results of the survey conducted in the first phase of the project, two organizations that appeared to be successfully employing prosumers were selected with the goal of learning what they are doing well in order to identify strategies from which other settings could learn. The first organization is a community mental health organization located in a small town in Ontario and offering a variety of supports, including case management, crisis services, and a social club. At this organization, most prosumers are employed in designated positions as peer support workers in a social club, a program distinct from other services within the organization. The second organization is a supported housing program located in a large city in Ontario, operating a residence where tenants have individual apartments but come together for certain planned activities and for some meals. Here, prosumers are employed entirely in designated positions and fill a variety of roles: peer support workers, facilitators for mealtimes, newsletter editors, and maintenance staff. All but two prosumers in this study worked part time.

In order to gain access to each organization, I met with members of management to negotiate the extent of access and the minimum length of the project. In addition, at the second organization, I attended a meeting of the entire organization (tenants, employees, and members of the Board of Directors) to explain the project, answer questions, and ask for permission to conduct the research. Employees at each organization (and all members at the second organization) were given an Information Form that outlined the processes for participant observation and document analysis. In this form, employees could choose to decline the invitation to be observed. In addition, each time that I joined an activity, I asked the employees' permission to observe and participate. Consent for interviews was obtained separately and through a signed consent form. Field notes were kept confidential so that interactions that employees did not wish to be made public were kept private from their colleagues.

At the first organization, 7 of 9 prosumers and 11 of 12 other workers were interviewed. At the second organization, 7 of 9 prosumers and 5 of 8 other workers were interviewed. There were, then, a total of 30 interviews.

## Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews were semistructured and lasted between 30 minutes and 2 hours. Participants were asked questions relating to the culture, characteristics and relationships at their organization: about the ways in which employees contributed to the organization; and how they were shown that they were valued and supported. For example, one question asked of participants was "How does this organization help you to do your job?"

In addition to the interviews at each organization, 122 hours were spent observing and participating at the first organization and 118 hours at the second. This involved participating in the work routines of prosumers and other employees, and paying close attention to the structure of the organizations and the relationships among co-workers.

Finally, data collection included document analyses: reviews of staff policies, staff organizational charts, job descriptions, mission statements, annual reports, budgets, staff work schedules, blank staff evaluation forms, and service user handbooks.

The analysis was an emergent process: Codes were not predetermined but rather emerged as the analysis unfolded. Data analysis began in the field; as categories were created, these were applied and either supported or disconfirmed through future data collection activities. Beginning analysis while still in the field allowed for a constant comparison (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) of categories and future data. It also provided an opportunity to share an unfolding understanding with employees of the organizations (Fetterman, 1998). This enquiry process continued after data collection. Employees were asked to comment on a report and how it corresponded to their experiences of working at their particular organization. Suggestions from employees were then incorporated into the final reports. Given that this project was for a doctoral dissertation, analysis was completed individually by the author.

Field notes and interview transcripts were combined as one data set and organized by finding codes, then by linking these codes to find categories, and then by exploring the relationships among categories to find themes (Davies, 1999; Fetterman, 1998; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). For example, the category “Provide Strong Leadership Supportive of Prosumer Employment” began with these initial codes: management sets an example in the community, management sets an example for other staff, and management prepares staff for prosumer colleagues. This category was then combined with several other categories that had their own codes (Celebrate the Strengths of Prosumers; Create Permanent, Valued Positions Designated for Prosumers; and Consider Experience with the Mental Health System as a Strength in Hiring) to create the overall theme “Create the Context for Prosumer Employment.” The themes presented here were endorsed by a majority of participants and/or were observed consistently.

### **Researcher Attitudes**

I approached this study considering the employment of prosumers in designated positions as a segregated approach to employment. As the study progressed, I began to see that, in the unique contexts of the organizations studied, this strategy seems to succeed at creating opportunities for prosumers to demonstrate their strengths and to contribute to services for other consumer-survivors. Indeed, it became clear to me that some of the separateness created by having designated positions helped to increase autonomy and to avoid co-optation of prosumers (see Grant, 2010).

### **Limitations of the Study**

Some may consider it a weakness that this project, as a qualitative study, does not provide generalizable statements about organizations that support prosumer employment. Sacrificing this generalizability, however, means that an in-depth account of my experiences of the realities at the two organizations studied is produced. These realities, however, are bounded by time: two and a half months at the first organization and three and a half months at the second organization. The realities accessed, then, represent the realities constructed during these time periods.

## **FINDINGS**

The research suggests that both organizations are successful at supporting prosumer employment: All prosumers interviewed stated that they are satisfied with their jobs, and that they are able to maintain their

employment. The themes emerge from the strategies the organizations use to increase prosumer employment success. As each strategy is described, it is supported with data from interviews, participant observations, and/or document analyses. When interview participants are quoted, they are named with a pseudonym they chose and identified as a prosumer (P) or not a prosumer (NP).

## Themes

### *Create the Context for Prosumer Employment*

Both organizations have actively created a context in which prosumer employment is both sought and valued.

**Provide strong leadership supportive of prosumer employment.** At both organizations, there is strong leadership committed to employing prosumers, which models to other employees and, indeed, to the general public, the value of prosumer employment. For example, Mary (NP) at the first organization described it in this way:

So when I go out and I talk to businesses out there and I'm promoting consumers and "hire somebody with a mental illness"... it's, "Well do you do it?" "Absolutely. We're half consumers on staff..." So you can speak with a lot more conviction, and I think you have a bit more credibility to do that.

Doug, a prosumer at this same organization, alluded to the leadership demonstrated by management staff toward valuing prosumer employees.

One thing our supervisor and [a member of management] have always tried to instill in us is the fact that ... we work together, both [prosumers and other employees]. And there used to be a feeling there's a bit of separation there, that we ... didn't quite make it as true employees because we were consumers. But I don't think that's there now.

**Celebrate the strengths of prosumers.** Tracey (NP) advised that organizations wishing to hire prosumers should consider the strengths of their service users.

Well, I would say for people who are running housing programs: "Review your client files, see where the strengths are. See what prior experience you can build on..." I went through the files and thought, "What skills are untapped here?"

One question NP participants were asked was, "What have you learned by working alongside prosumers?" Anne (NP) mentioned "their ability to speak about it.... They're very open and honest and trusting to tell you everything.... So I guess I've learned to be more trusting ... opening up, you know?"

Samantha, an NP employee from the second organization, noted that prosumer employees bring insights and strengths that she does not have because of their experiences with the mental health system: "There is no way for me ever to understand how it feels to have ... a mental health crisis because I've never been in one. So I think it's a great advantage because they exactly know how it feels.... I might have the book knowledge, but what I'm lacking is the personal experience." Marianne (NP) from the same organization specified that this experiential knowledge has influenced her response to crisis situations, noting that, by watching prosumers manage crises, she has learned to "stand back a little, right, and to not just want to dive in and fix everything 'cause you really can't. You just have to be there for support."



**Create permanent, valued positions designated for prosumers.** Both organizations support prosumer employment by creating positions that are designated for prosumers. These positions are not considered “make-work projects,” but are, as two staff members at the first organization stated, “real work for real pay.” George (P) from the first organization asserted, “This isn’t a token job.”

At both organizations, prosumers are full employees and are not considered to be transitional employees. One NP participant at the first organization shared that her funder is asking her to limit the period of employment of individual prosumers so that more prosumers can be trained. Her response demonstrates her commitment to long-term prosumer employment: “I’m not going to hire a consumer and tell them they can have the job for 4 months and that’s it. You wouldn’t say that to other employees.”

**Consider experience with the mental health system as a strength in hiring.** The staffing policy at the first organization reads, “All else being equal, those with experience with the mental health system have the advantage in the hiring process.” They follow through on this policy in two ways: by advertising that such experience is welcomed and by hiring consumer-survivors in both designated and non-designated positions.

If an organization succeeds at hiring prosumers, the two organizations in this study will provide some meaningful ways to support this employment, as summarized by the remaining themes.

#### *Encourage Autonomy*

The two organizations take steps to encourage autonomy of prosumer employees. They encourage peer support and display trust.

**Encourage peer support.** Both organizations hold weekly meetings for prosumer employees. When asked how she was supported in her job, Shawna (P) from the second organization said, “I’m helped to do my job well with the suggestions at the [prosumer] meetings.” At one meeting, one of the prosumers educated her supervisor about the importance of peer support. When the prosumer asked for some help with a challenging situation and the supervisor started to answer, the prosumer interrupted the supervisor to say “maybe other [prosumers] could say if it happened to them.”

**Display trust.** Trust appears to be important to supporting prosumer employment. The atmosphere of trust at the second organization was expressed from the first encounter with the organization, when a member of management said that employing prosumers takes “a leap of faith ... and they meet and exceed our expectations.” This trust is also apparent in the fact that prosumers at the second organization work almost completely independently. While trust permeates the first organization less, Brian (P) described how this organization helps him to feel valued: “They trust me. They trust me to make sure the work’s done and I do it.”

#### *Provide a Supportive Atmosphere*

A supportive atmosphere is evident at both organizations, where attention is paid to the hiring of supervisors and where employees are recognized.

**Employ supervisors able to “walk the line.”** Prosumers at both organizations highly valued the support provided by their supervisors. At the first organization, many peer support workers commented that their supervisor was the most important source of support in their work, and highlighted the informal nature of

the support. George (P) talked about how he feels about working with his supervisor: “I love working with [my supervisor] on Wednesday night. That’s why I took Wednesdays again. I was only working Sundays for a while..., but I didn’t like it ... I missed working with [my supervisor], so I went back to Wednesdays.” Another prosumer, Margaret, spoke of enjoying the informal time she is able to spend with the supervisor: “She asks how my life is and how things are going, and I ask how hers is and how things are going.”

At the second organization, prosumers also stressed the importance of an informal approach to supervision. Most prosumers work when management staff are not on site; however, management staff have made themselves extremely accessible to staff members, as is evident in this conversation with a prosumer, documented in field notes.

She told me that she is able to call [two managers] at home... [One], she said, she can call even just to talk. If she is calling for that kind of reason, though, she has to say, “It’s not an emergency,” so that if [the manager] is busy, [he or she] can tell her that and call her back.

**Recognize employee contributions.** Prosumers at both organizations said that they feel they are recognized for their contributions to the organizations. For example, Elizabeth (P) described how she and an NP co-worker responded to “the banging” of a resident damaging his apartment one night. The NP worker said the next day, “Thanks for your help, I couldn’t’ve done it without you.”

Joe (P) noted that prosumers often contribute volunteer time to the organization (as do other employees) and that this is actively valued through bonuses. “Last summer ... some of the peer support workers did the painting as volunteer time. And come Christmas time I got a very healthy bonus [laughter].”

### *Set Up Prosumers for Success*

Understanding and implementing the contexts and supports for prosumer success was a particular strength of the two organizations, each of which put a great deal of thought into the conditions under which prosumers would thrive.

**Make it manageable.** Both organizations appear to be aware of the reality that employment has been inaccessible for most prosumers, which means they have little work experience. One of the ways in which the organizations respond to this is by clearly laying out the roles for prosumers. Winston (P) noted this when he described why he needs very little supervision: “We already know what we’re supposed to do. We have a sheet with ... a daily checklist of the things we’re supposed to do, so we just follow that. If there’s a problem, we go see [a member of management].”

Tracey (NP) noted that when a new prosumer starts work (and especially a prosumer who has not been employed recently), it is important to “start slow.” Evidence of this was provided by the second organization’s focus on having new employees work alongside experienced employees until prosumers decide they are comfortable with their new positions.

**Offer flexible working conditions.** The results of this study suggest that prosumers should be provided with extra support and supervision when required, for example, when experiencing active symptoms. Noting “that’s life, people get sick,” Tom (NP) from the second organization described this accommodation as “sitting down with them, making sure they’re OK, if they need time off, switching shifts.” Both organizations



allow for flexible work schedules by planning shifts on a monthly basis to facilitate the trading of shifts. The organizations also provide extended medical leaves of absence (LOAs) as required. Jane (NP), from the first organization, described the flexibility in this way: “There’s certainly accommodations for medical LOAs.... There’s no time limit on them.... Doctor’s appointments are accommodated, last minute phone calls—‘I’m just way depressed. I couldn’t even get myself out of bed, I can’t make it in.’”

At the first organization, there was a prosumer who had been on leave for over 2 years, yet her position was still open to her. At the second, a prosumer resigned from his job while struggling with his mental health, but the organization kept his position open in case he changed his mind after his mental health had improved. This flexibility is possible at both organizations because they hire more than the minimum number of employees required.

**Help prosumers navigate health and social systems.** As Adriana (NP) from the first organization described, “It’s very important to help [prosumers] work within the constraints that other systems put on them.” At both organizations, most of the prosumers receive benefits from the Ontario Disability Support Program, and the rules of this program challenge consumer-survivors’ ability to be employed by limiting the benefit they gain from extra income. Both organizations helped prosumers to navigate these barriers by tracking their hours and either telling them when they are close to the limit (so they can choose not to work, if they wish) or only scheduling them at the limit.

## DISCUSSION

The results suggest that the two organizations in this study strategically support prosumer employment in the following ways: create the context for consumer-survivor employment, encourage autonomy, provide a supportive atmosphere, and set up consumer-survivors for success. I do not claim that these strategies for supporting prosumer employment are present at all organizations, nor do I claim that they will be successful at all organizations. Rather, they are presented for other organizations, particularly those with designated prosumer positions, to consider within their own local and unique context. It appears that the two organizations in this study are successful at employing prosumers because they actively support their employment in multiple ways: in hiring, in working conditions, and in attitudes.

It is vital that organizations that sincerely wish to increase the number of prosumer employees make explicit, as the first organization in this study does and as Chinman et al. (2006) suggest, the fact that experience with the mental health system is valued. To follow through effectively on this, strong leadership advocating for and supporting prosumer employment appears to be vital. It may be important for members of management to first facilitate open discussions with employees who are not prosumers to ensure that all members of an organization are ready for the step of hiring prosumers (Besio & Mahler, 1993). If management takes the time to facilitate discussions about prosumers and to provide some education about the contributions possible by prosumers (Carlson et al., 2001; Davidson et al., 1997; Jonikas, Solomon, & Cook, 1997; Zippel et al., 1997), the transition will likely be smoother. Once the hiring of prosumers has been successful, an organization can direct its attention to working conditions.

Both organizations in this study have created concrete strategies related to working conditions for supporting prosumer employment. Most of the prosumers receive benefits from the Ontario Disability Support

Program (ODSP), and the rules of this program challenge consumer-survivors' ability to be employed by subtracting income from monthly pensions to the extent that very little benefit is achieved (Ministry of Community and Social Services, n.d.). This can impose barriers and create anxiety as prosumers try to organize their work schedules around the limits so as to at least cover extra expenses. The support provided by the organizations appears to relieve some of this anxiety, and the flexibility allows employees to make choices about the number of hours they wish to work.

Both organizations hold weekly meetings for prosumer employees that are an integral part of the support of employees. As noted, this is a strategy that several authors have suggested (e.g., Davidson et al., 1997; Dixon et al., 1997). Prosumers did tell Davidson et al. (1997), though, that meetings held for prosumers only might be experienced as a form of segregation. No prosumer in the present study raised that concern; however, it is an important consideration, and organizations should thus involve prosumers in the decision about peer meetings.

In addition to the support prosumers stated that they felt at their weekly peer meetings, prosumers at both organizations valued the support provided by their supervisors. A supervisor who is informal, flexible, understanding, and able to "walk the line" between a supervisory role and a friendship may be an important factor in supporting prosumer employment.

Other authors have cited the need for accommodations for prosumers (Fishbein et al., 1995; Mowbray, 1997). Specifically, others have suggested flexible working schedules to allow for appointments and sick leaves (Doherty et al., 2004; Paulson et al., 1999). In order to allow for this flexibility, Paulson et al. (1999) recommended having more staff than required. The two organizations provide flexibility in leaves of absence and are able to do this by hiring more prosumers than the bare minimum so that coverage of shifts is not a problem. In addition, the organizations make allowance for the relative lack of employment experience of their prosumer employees by breaking work into manageable pieces.

The provision of accommodations is often cited in the literature as a barrier to employing prosumers (e.g., Fishbein et al., 1995; Mowbray, 1997). The experience of the two organizations in this study suggests that accommodations need not be cumbersome. At the second organization, it was difficult for management to recognize the accommodations provided, such is the natural approach taken to them. Perhaps the organizations' attitudes toward accommodations reflect, as Davidson et al. (1997) have suggested, that a more flexible working environment is beneficial to all employees.

Prosumer positions in this study are permanent positions and this, combined with the trust that prosumers stated they felt toward their employer and the recognition they experienced, seemed to represent an important statement by the organizations—that prosumer employees were integral parts of the functioning of the organizations.

In addition to the concrete suggestions related to hiring and working conditions, there appear to be important attitudinal aspects of supporting prosumer employees.

Zipple et al. (1997) suggested that prosumers in designated positions may not have the same status as other colleagues. I also noted that my attitude entering the study was similar to this perspective: that designated prosumer positions may serve to segregate prosumers. The two organizations in this study seem to have taken steps to mitigate this risk, by creating meaningful positions and by taking a long-term, rather

than transitional, approach to prosumer employment. However, as described elsewhere (Grant, 2010), the prosumer employees are segregated in some ways. It is vital that prosumer and other employees have opportunities to work together so that co-workers are able to witness the strengths of their prosumer colleagues. This may happen through meetings for all staff, as the first organization has implemented, or through shared work, which neither organization has accomplished (Grant, 2006). It would also be of benefit to continue to increase the complement of prosumer employees, including in management roles. This may be the next step in challenging the employment stigma often directed at prosumers: In this study, they were rarely considered for roles with supervisory responsibilities. However, as Chinman et al. (2006) have asserted, designated positions may be the first step toward more fully integrated prosumer positions.

Despite these areas for growth, the participants display some attitudes that may be important for organizations wishing to support prosumer employment: willingness to learn from strengths of prosumers, and communicating that prosumers are valued and trusted. At both organizations it appears that the trust translates into high expectations that are possible to reach because of the supports discussed above. This trust requires recognition among all staff members of the strengths that prosumers can bring to mental health support work.

This study has highlighted some of the supports for prosumer employment. Undoubtedly, there are more and future research should be directed toward identifying them, perhaps through a survey of a larger group of prosumers. In addition, future research conducted with prosumers could help to prioritize the employment supports so that organizations can determine where to invest time and money. Finally, the supports this project has identified exist in organizations that, for the most part, employ prosumers in designated positions. Future research directed at prosumers in non-designated positions would help us to understand how prosumers contribute in other roles at community mental health organizations and how employment in other roles is actively supported.

With such clear contributions to be made to mental health support work by prosumers (Solomon, 2004), organizations can change the question of *whether* to employ prosumers to *how* to employ prosumers. This paper has started this exploration by sharing strategies from two Ontario community mental organizations that successfully employ prosumers. These two organizations have taken relatively simple steps in hiring processes, working conditions, and attitudes to demonstrate a commitment to prosumer employment. The efforts toward implementing these strategies suggest the high value that the organizations place on prosumer employees.

## NOTE

1. This term is not commonly used, but has been used by Frese and Davis (1997); Davidson, Weingarten, Steiner, Stayner, and Hoge (1997); and Salzer (1997); and its use has been noted by Solomon (2004). It refers to those who have experienced serious mental illnesses and who now work in mental health services.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article présente les résultats d'une étude ethnographique portant sur l'embauche, par deux organismes ontariens de santé mentale communautaire, de personnes ayant un vécu psychiatrique et qui sont bénéficiaires de soins en santé mentale. J'ai utilisé la méthodologie suivante : des entrevues avec le personnel des deux organismes, des séances d'observation participante, et l'analyse de documents qui m'a permis d'examiner

l'environnement de travail et les façons qu'utilisent les centres pour soutenir les employés qui ont un vécu psychiatrique et qui sont bénéficiaires de soins en santé mentale. Les thèmes qui sont ressortis permettent d'illustrer certaines des stratégies qu'utilisent les centres à cet effet : a) créer un contexte favorable à l'emploi de ces personnes ; b) encourager l'autonomie ; c) installer une ambiance aidante ; et d) mettre en place les conditions nécessaires et soutenir ces personnes pour qu'elles remplissent avec succès leur tâche. À partir de ces observations, je fais des recommandations portant sur le processus d'embauche, les conditions de travail et les comportements à adopter.

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