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COMMUNITY SUPPORT EVALUATION: SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT EMPLOYMENT NEEDS FOCUS GROUP—EMPLOYMENT SPECIALIST VERSION

VERBAL SCRIPT

Welcome and Introduction

Good [morning/afternoon/evening]. My name is [insert first name] and I will be your moderator for this sessions. I work for ICF—a research firm in located in Atlanta, GA. We have been contracted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to moderate this discussion. You have been invited here because SAMHSA is interested in hearing your opinions about the specific employment needs of program participants, potential employers, and employment specialists working to link consumers with employment.

Thank all of you for agreeing to participate. Your comments and suggestions are very important. Our discussion will take about 90 minutes. Before we begin, I want to let you know that I am not an expert on [INSERT STATE NAME] supported employment. Rather, my role as the moderator is to:

- Get your perceptions, opinions, and suggestions about various topics.
- Help guide the flow of the conversation.
- Make sure that everyone has an equal chance to weigh in.
- Ensure questions about various aspects of the topics are covered.

Ground Rules

Before we begin, I'd like to review some ground rules for today's discussion.

- ICF is required to have approval from the Office of Management and Budget to conduct this focus group. The approval number for this project is XXXX-XXXX. Also, if you have any comments regarding the time estimates associated with this study or suggestions on making this process simpler, please write to: Robin Davis, Project Director, ICF International, Telephone: (404)-592-2188, Email: robin.davis@icfi.com, 3 Corporate Square, NE, Suite 370, Atlanta, GA 30329. [Moderator: Post this bullet on white board for each session.]
- We are audiotaping this focus group. I ask that you speak loudly and clearly. If I think you are speaking too softly to be heard on the recording, I will ask you to speak up.
- Don't engage in side conversations—we need for everyone to hear what the others are saying and for everything that's said to be heard easily on the recording.
- We would like to hear from everyone in the group, but you don't have to answer every question. Sometimes I'll ask everyone for their input. At other times, I will just throw a topic open for general discussion.
- There are no right or wrong answers. We expect differences in how people see things and want to understand these differences.

- Feel free to disagree or question each other. The purpose of a group session is for us to learn things in group interchanges that we don't get out of one-on-one discussions. If someone says something you disagree with or see in a different way, please share with the group.
- Please be considerate when participants are sharing their different experiences, needs, or perspectives. The point of this activity is to understand the employment needs of consumers, employment specialists, and employers as well as understanding where there is strong agreement/consensus of these needs and where there is little agreement about these needs.
- Your participation is voluntary. Therefore, at any point in time you may leave the virtual focus group room.
- If you would like to share an opinion anonymously, you may send a private response to the moderator to read to the group. However, note that the moderator will not read private responses if doing so will interrupt the flow of the discussion or the group has moved beyond the topic.
- If you have another phone, please turn it off or set to vibrate.
- If you need to step away from your computer or phone during this meeting, please send a "chat" message to me when you leave and when you have returned. Please do not put this line on hold if your phone is programmed to play hold music.

Participant Introduction

I'd like to start by having you all introduce yourselves. Please tell us your first name (or the name you would like to use for this focus group and how long you've been there in your current role. Then, assuming you're at your desk and have your webcam working, show something on your desk or in your office that reveals something about yourself, like a hobby or favorite vacation spot.

To begin, moderator reads [or shares] a brief description of the State's SE program, including the target population and program goals.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Background

1. What are your primary responsibilities as Employment Specialists?
 - How long have you served in this role?
 - What portion of your time is spent on each?
 - Probe % time spent working with clients and employers.
 - How well does this match the expectations of your role?

Thank you. We will revisit the topic of the employment specialist role later on in the discussion. Right now, I would like to spend some time talking about the needs of the supported employment consumers—or "clients"—and their employment experiences.

2. Generally speaking, what are the characteristics of the clients you serve?
 - Probe gender, race/ethnicity, and age.
 - **[As appropriate]** Probe location, geography (rural/urban), culture, education level, veteran status, languages spoken, etc.
3. In your experience, what aspects of employment are most important to your clients?
 - Probe the following:
 - Employment level (FT or PT)
 - Work schedule or flexibility

- Industry
 - Ability to use existing or learn new skillset
 - Compensation amount and/or frequency
 - Benefit availability (e.g., healthcare, sick leave, overtime pay, etc.)
 - Other
 - What aspects have you had most success matching? Why?
4. What are some examples of client needs and/or accommodation requests for employers?
- Probe issues related to the following:
 - Work schedule and/or location
 - Transportation
 - Medical/health (e.g., appointments, treatments)
 - Family (e.g., child care)
 - Legal
 - Other
 - How have you been involved in this process of ensure accommodations are put into place?
 - What impact, if any, have these requests had on your ability to match clients with employers?
 - How willing are employers to provide accommodations?
 - What facilitates their ability to provide accommodations?
 - What challenges have they faced?
5. What experiences have **clients who disclosed their situations to employers** shared with you about having their needs met in the workplace?
- What needs/accommodations were met and unmet?
 - How did this impact their ability to complete the work? To continue to be employed?
 - Probe for common reasons for job turnover among clients who have disclosed.
 - How did client disclosure impact your ability to help meet their needs?
 - Did employers keep the client's information confidential?
6. Along the same lines, what experiences have **clients who did not disclose their situations to employers** shared with you about having their needs met in the workplace?
- What needs/accommodations were met and unmet due to nondisclosure?
 - How did this impact their ability to complete the work? To continue to be employed?
 - Probe for common reasons for job turnover among clients who did not disclose.
 - How did client non-disclosure impact your ability to help meet their needs?
 - What were some of the reasons for not disclosing?

Employer Needs

Now let's talk about the needs and experiences of employers you have engaged. I'd like to discuss differences across employers that are and are not aware of client status as SE consumers.

7. In your experience, what strategies and/or resources are critical to **engaging employers** when trying to place clients?
- Probe the following:
 - Trust
 - Ability to develop rapport/relationship-building
 - Meeting in person
 - Maintaining regular communication

- Having an outgoing personality
- Other
- What aspects are key to gaining their participation **in supported employment programs**? In addition to the above, probe the following:
 - Program information or materials
 - Examples of successful placements
 - Continued involvement by employment specialist
 - Assurances (defined by employer)
 - Other
- How can these relationships be sustained over the long term?
- What recommendations do you have for engaging employers?

8. In your experience, **when working with employers who are aware their employees are SE consumers**, what factors determine their willingness to participate in the SE program?

[Moderator: Acknowledge that not every employer is aware that he/she is participating in a SE program, if the consumer has chosen not to disclose.]

- Probe consumer- and program-related assurances, company size, industry, training received, experience with program, employee buy-in, quality of relationships, etc.
- Probe benefits of participation.
- What factors facilitate participation?
- What factors pose barriers to participation?
- What recommendations do you have for encouraging employer willingness to participate?

9. What experiences have employers shared with you about placements you've made?

- Probe differences across disclosed and non-disclosed clients.
- What are some of the positive employer experiences related to client disclosure?
- What are some of the negative employer experiences related to client disclosure?
- In your opinion, what factors should determine whether a client discloses their SE status?

Employment Specialist Needs

Next, we would like to understand the needs and experiences of employment specialists as they relate to meeting client needs, as well as the needs of potential employers.

10. We are interested in understanding training you received as part of local supported employment program. What types of training did you receive related to the evidence-based Individual Placement Support (IPS) model?

- Who provided the training? In what format(s)? Probe in-person and virtual.
- What aspects of the training best prepared you for your role?
- What aspects were not helpful to you in your role?
- How would you rate the overall quality of the training? The materials? Why?
- How could the training be improved?
- Please also tell us about trainings related to SE you received prior to working in this capacity?

11. What training or guidance did you receive related to the local SE program model? For example, training related to the target population or specific program goals.

12. How many clients do you generally have at one time? How manageable is your client load?

- In your opinion, what is a manageable number of clients to have at once?

- What factors facilitate your ability to meet individual client needs (e.g., client participation, regular communication, available resources, etc.)?
- What factors most impede your ability to meet individual client needs (e.g., lack of resources/time, client personal problems, level of commitment, etc.)?

13. How do you define a successful placement?

- Probe the following:
 - Match with client needs and/or preferences
 - Match with employer needs
 - Client and employer satisfaction
 - Whether client discloses
 - Length of client employment
 - Employer willingness and/or ability to provide accommodations, etc.
 - Other
- What percent of the placements you've made have been successful?
- What factors facilitated these successful placements?
- What factors posed barriers to successful placement?

14. What tools or resources would improve your ability to meet the program goals?

Recommendations

Based on your experiences, we would like to hear your opinions about program sustainability and scalability.

15. In your opinion, what are the most critical aspects of the local SE program to sustain from the consumer perspective? From the employer perspective?

- Probe the following:
 - ES position and/or other staff positions
 - Existing and/or additional materials and resources
 - Training
 - Involvement of professional networks
 - Strategies to gain employer participation/buy-in
 - Funding
 - Policy changes, etc.
 - Other
- Probe best practice recommendations
- In your opinion, how likely is it that the program will be sustained?

16. SAMHSA would like to prioritize scaling up the SE program within funded states. Can you share what is needed to support large-scale adoption of this program in your State?

- Probe the following:
 - Policy changes
 - Training (mandatory and non-mandatory)
 - Outreach and awareness materials or campaigns
 - Funding
 - Technology
 - Involvement of professional networks
 - Other
- What best practices do you recommend to achieve this?