



MARCH 2014

# ACCESS TO RECOVERY PROGRAM BRIEF

## **The Career Building Initiative**

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*The Massachusetts Access to Recovery Program (MA-ATR) has designed a program that is helping participants prepare for employment. It's working!*

**cbi** Career  
Building  
Initiative



## EMPLOYMENT MATTERS!

ATR participants who were employed at program intake were:

- Less likely to be involved with the criminal justice system
- More likely to have stable housing
- More likely to be connected with family and friends

### Introducing the Career Building Initiative

The Massachusetts Access to Recovery Program (MA-ATR) is a 6-month program designed to help people recently released from jail who have drug and alcohol problems move onto a positive path in their recovery and re-entry to the community. The process of recovery is a personal one with physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. The promise of MA-ATR is to ensure that a full range of resource options are available to the participants to support them in this critical transition.

To fulfill this promise, MA-ATR, now in its fourth year of operation, has created an integrated and coordinated system of care in two counties in Massachusetts (Hampden and Suffolk). The program unites traditional treatment services with a host of community and faith-based recovery supports.

Recognizing that employment is positively associated with success in re-entry, recovery, and successful completion of substance abuse treatment, Massachusetts created a unique program to help people re-entering their communities prepare for and obtain employment. The Career Building Initiative was initiated in Grant Year 2 of the MA-ATR Program (summer, 2012) and continues today, in the program's fourth year. Based on preliminary findings, this popular program, completed by nearly 70 percent of enrollees, may well be increasing their odds of securing employment. As discussed below, those who participated in the CBI program experienced an improvement in their rate of employment that far exceeded non-participants.

This Program Brief describes the design and initial outcomes of the Career Building Initiative. Topics addressed include:

- The importance of employment to re-entry and recovery,
- The major design elements of the CBI program,
- Early CBI results, and
- Key learnings and emerging opportunities.

### The Importance of Employment to Re-Entry and Recovery: Antecedents to the CBI Program

Research literature suggests that employment is beneficial to people in recovery in a variety of ways. People in recovery consistently say that finding employment is an important goal.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, along with family support, being employed is one of the best predictors of successful substance abuse treatment.<sup>2</sup> Those who do find employment are also less likely to abuse substances.<sup>3</sup> Finally, employment helps people make a positive transition to community life and may reduce the likelihood of recidivism.<sup>4</sup> Among the many reasons cited to explain this powerful impact are increased self-esteem, the fact that work lends structure to the day, and the social connections made through work.

To determine how employment status was related to key outcomes for ATR participants, the MA-ATR team used SAMHSA's performance measurement tool—the GPRA survey—to quantitatively assess the relationship between employment at ATR entry and selected re-entry outcomes at the time of the six month follow-up interview, controlling for an individual's re-entry/ recovery status at baseline, as well as education, age, gender, and race/ethnicity.<sup>5</sup> The results corroborate a key finding of the literature: that employment does contribute to successful re-entry into community life. More specifically, at the six-month follow-up, we found that:

- The odds of criminal justice involvement were 40% lower for employed vs. not employed ATR participants.

- The odds of being in stable housing were two times greater for employed vs. not employed ATR participants.
- The odds of being connected with family and friends were 67% greater for employed vs. not employed ATR participants.

Reaping the benefits of employment proved elusive for most MA-ATR participants, however. They had difficulty sustaining involvement in job training programs, and finding and retaining employment was at least equally hard. Among significant barriers to obtaining employment were their limited work histories, criminal justice involvement, and substance use issues. Especially in today’s difficult economic climate, they needed well thought-out, targeted assistance to help them succeed.

### **CBI Design**

To provide ATR participants with opportunities to pursue employment, the MA-ATR team set aside a portion of its annual voucher funds for a special Career Building Initiative (CBI) program. This program funds training to enhance job readiness skills as well as specific occupational training programs.

The design of CBI utilized principles and practices found to be successful in several key governmental entities: 1) SAMHSA’s Supported Employment evidence based practice 2) SAMHSA’s Behavioral Day Treatment and Contingency Managed Housing and Work Therapy program 3) Federal Work-Study, 4) the Veterans Administration’s GI Bill, and 5) On-the Job Training and Apprenticeship programs through the Department of Labor.

1. The team used key principles of SAMHSA’s Supported Employment (SE), an evidence-based practice that has been found to help individuals with mental health disorders find and sustain employment. SE is based on the core belief that anyone who wants to work, no matter the barriers, is entitled to work. Critical ingredients of a Supportive Employment program include, among other things, individualized support tailored to an individual’s strengths and deficits, coordination with other treatment providers or case managers, and follow-up once on the job. Evidence shows that with adequate support and appropriate program design, these individuals can succeed at work.

The team felt that MA-ATR participants, many of whom had histories of trauma, depression, and other mental health disorders in addition to their substance use disorder, would also benefit from a customized approach. The team engaged employment and training providers who were willing to customize their job readiness training and occupational training programs to meet the needs of the MA-ATR population. For example, providers incorporated extensive supports and guidance into their programs. The curriculum was designed to increase self-awareness, develop more effective communication skills, and show participants how to interact with others in a healthy and productive way.

The team also chose providers who could prepare participants for employment in occupations that tend to be more accepting of people with criminal backgrounds, such as construction, food service, commercial cleaning, building maintenance, and customer service. In all, nine provider organizations were selected to offer either basic job readiness classes or occupational training. Some short training programs were 1-4 weeks in duration; more formal occupational training programs were as long as 12 weeks. Several of the training programs offer industry-recognized certifications for those who pass the tests.

2. SAMHSA’s Behavioral Day Treatment and Contingency Managed Housing and Work Therapy is a program for adults who are homeless and have co-occurring substance use disorders. The program helps participants to stop using substances and provides them with housing and work training. Participants work 5.5 hours each weekday and are paid minimum wage.

### **Participant Quote**

*“ They taught me how to be responsible... being on time affects other people, not just myself. ”*



## KEY ELEMENTS OF CBI

1. Job training opportunities customized for participants in recovery
2. Training for job sectors most likely to be open to hiring ATR participants
3. Career preparation that is not funded at the expense of basic needs vouchers
4. Additional training benefits for participants to address the disincentive of income loss

3. The federal and state work/study is a program that helps students earn money to pay for their training. The government has supported work/study models that support low income individuals to obtain training and education while getting paid for their work in these initiatives. Work/study has a long history of success with people who do not have adequate resources or incomes to study or learn new skills.
4. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers an alternative way to use VA GI Bill benefits for education and training. If a person is a veteran or in the guard or reserve and enters a training program for a new job, that individual can receive monthly training benefits.
5. And finally, The Registered Apprenticeship system has been utilized to meet the needs of America's skilled workforce for over 75 years. It is a unique, flexible training system that combines job related technical instruction with structured on-the-job learning experiences. This "Earn and Learn" training model of Registered Apprenticeship provides a unique combination of structured learning with on-the-job training from an assigned mentor.

MA ATR used these models in working with its community and faith based partners to meet the needs and circumstances of ATR participants. The MA-ATR Career Building Initiative worked with interested and expert employment and training, non-profit community, and faith providers to develop work/study, apprenticeship, and on-the-job training programs that were from one to twelve weeks in length, used peer and adult learning models, had experience working with people who had a criminal justice and substance use history, had a proven record of getting people employment post training, and would participate in the MA-ATR voucher system.

Noting that relatively few ATR participants had taken advantage of vocational training during the first year of the program, the team designed CBI to overcome barriers to participation. During the program's first year, participants had to use their own limited voucher funds to pay for the costs of employment and training services. Relatively few of them elected to do so. Instead, they used their limited funds to address such basic needs as clothing, transportation, and cell phones. By creating a separate fund for vocational supports, MA-ATR eliminated the need for participants to choose between these pressing short-range needs and programs to help them find a productive future. In addition, CBI further facilitated program participation by partnering with the providers to offer a combination of training and training benefits.

ATR vouchers are used by these enrolled providers to provide the supports and training in their programs and includes a portion of the voucher that funds the ATR client's work study/on-the-job participation at the rate of \$8.00 per hour. The combination of the job training and the training benefits was what was different from the initial offerings to the ATR participants.

These changes had a dramatic effect. So many participants wished to take advantage of the program that the CBI account was exhausted within the first 6 months of start-up. Although some providers allowed additional participants to attend classes without charge, program funding was unavailable until the next grant year.

### Early CBI Results

Five hundred thirty-two (532) program enrollments took place, representing 407 unique individuals (some of the MA-ATR participants who attended the job readiness programs went on to participate in the lengthier occupational training programs). Most participants (80%) were men, 52% were white, 27% Hispanic, and 20% African American, and 80% had up to a high school diploma or GED. The average age of participants was 35.

Of these participants, nearly 70 percent completed their CBI program. The completion rate was greater for occupational training participants compared to those in job readiness programs (80 percent and 64 percent, respectively).<sup>6</sup> Importantly, a comparison of the employment status

of CBI participants at the time of ATR enrollment and the six month follow-up showed a 700 percent increase in employment (from 4% to 32%). While this does not indicate causation, it does suggest a vast improvement, especially when compared to the more modest 144% rate of increase in employment among all ATR participants—16 percent were employed at baseline compared to 39 percent at the six month follow-up.<sup>7</sup>

## Preliminary Conclusions

These findings have significant implications for the ATR program. They suggest:

- Employment is an important and necessary part of successful recovery and re-entry into the community for individuals with substance use disorder and criminal justice background issues. This has been demonstrated in the literature as well as with MA-ATR GPRA data.
- When ATR participants have to choose between using their vouchers to address basic needs or participate in employment and training, the vast majority select the former. This indicates the need to provide training and employment services through a separate fund rather than requiring individuals to fund their participation at the expense of basic needs.
- It was the combination of the voucher's payment for both job training and additional training benefits that encouraged participants to attend CBI programs and may have contributed to high rates of completion of these programs. This is especially important for men, who do not qualify for transitional financial assistance that is available to mothers with children. Consequently, they choose to do what they can to earn immediate income rather than take steps to increase future employability. Third-party evaluators are continuing to refine their analysis of this aspect of the program.

## Making a Good Program Better: Fourth-Year Enhancements

After evaluating results of Grant Year 3's CBI program, the team increased the amount of program funding available in the 4th year. MA-ATR expects to offer vouchers for 666 enrollments for programs in job readiness, as well as occupational and on-the-job training in construction apprenticeship, commercial cleaning, hospitality/customer service, and food service. To enhance program effectiveness, the team made the following changes for the Year 4 CBI program:

- Streamlined the number of job training programs offered so that only those providers with the best results were retained;
- Brought together the providers and the ATR Coordinators for group trainings so that better matches could be made between ATR participants and specific programs;
- Worked with providers to enhance the curriculum and supports for this population;
- Developed new, detailed completion and three-month follow-up surveys for both the participants and providers in order to obtain better data about outcomes (e.g., job placement and hourly wages).

This grant year will also find team members engaged in purposeful networking with local and state leaders in workforce development. In working with providers of employment and training services and with providers of substance use treatment, the team observed that they had little understanding of each other's work and lacked experience in coordinating their efforts to help clients succeed. Substance use treatment providers are not proficient at addressing their clients' employment and training needs, and employment and training providers are not adept at serving the special population of people in recovery. This suggests the need for training and technical assistance to both groups.

### Participant Quote

“*If someone had asked me before this class what my good qualities were, I would have said — none. Now I can honestly look someone in the face and tell them some good qualities that I have.*”



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To begin to raise awareness of this need, MA-ATR has begun to network with leaders in the MA workforce development system at both the state and local levels, sharing information and encouraging strategic planning to address the issue. A leadership team consisting of the ATR Project Director, the Single State Authority's Director and its Directory of Planning and Development, the Director of the Boston Private Industry Council, and the Deputy Director of the Mayor's Office of Jobs and Community Services have been meeting regularly to develop specific plans to increase coordination between the systems.

The team will also seek additional data to better gauge program effectiveness. The ATR program is six months in duration, and the GPRA questionnaire stops at the six month point in time. However, post-intervention information would be very useful in gauging the enduring impact of ATR and CBI on recovery, re-entry, and employment. To help address this gap, the MA-ATR team has designed and implemented separate CBI provider and participant surveys. The provider survey is administered to training providers at the time of program completion and captures data on participant attendance and motivation, completion, "fit" with the program, and any job referral. The participant survey is administered at program graduation and 3 months later. It seeks information on employment status, wages, the connection between the job and the training program (if any), and perceptions of program value. Together, these surveys will provide more detailed information on participant success in their chosen training programs, their perceptions of these programs, and on their early employment and earnings experience.

### **Emerging Opportunities and Challenges**

Much has been learned about designing, implementing, and assessing employment and training programs for MA-ATR participants. Although the early results suggest that CBI is meeting the needs of this special population group, future years present further opportunities to expand and improve our support for program participants. For example, while MA ATR offered and encouraged peer support services with Recovery Coaching, few participants chose to utilize Recovery Coaches. The employment and training literature suggests that greater use of coaches and mentors may well be very useful in maintaining high levels of job retention. In future iterations of a CBI program, we will explore how to make better use of Recovery Coaches for CBI participants.

In future years, the CBI program hopes that its coordination with workforce development leaders will bear fruit in several ways. First, ATR participants may find increased opportunities to participate in mainstream employment programs. Second, cross-training and information outreach between substance abuse providers and workforce professionals may increase understanding and enhance teamwork, further benefiting participants. Specifically, the team hopes that the workforce development system will learn how to work effectively with people in recovery and that the substance use disorder treatment system will learn how to help their clients become ready to enter the job market, finding jobs that not only meet their interests and skills but that match occupations forecasted to grow in Massachusetts.

In addition, to fully understand the program's impact, the team is considering how to modify and extend the ATR data capture tools to create a more robust performance management and evaluation capability. Key issues to address include the following:

- Greater consistency in capturing baseline and six month follow-up status.
- The time periods covered at each of the two points of time (in the GPRA survey) vary. For example, the questions regarding criminal justice involvement address the 30-day period prior to interview, while the employment questions are point in time.

Examples of specific areas in which changes might facilitate a thorough understanding of cause and effect relationships within the program include:

1. The period preceding enrollment in ATR is limited to 30 days for criminal justice involvement and “at the time of enrollment: for employment. In addition to addressing the inconsistency between the two, *it would be very useful to extend the pre-program period.*
2. It would be useful to capture the criminal justice, employment, and other participant outcomes during the entire 6-month ATR experience. Currently, for example, we know whether an individual was employed at the time of program entry and at the 6-month follow-up; however, we do not know if an individual remained at the same job they held at program entry or changed jobs. Similarly, we do not know how long a person held a job prior to follow-up. This makes it very difficult to assess outcomes with confidence.
3. Data on the employment status of participants should be expanded to provide more information on the nature and quality of jobs that individuals have held (e.g., duration of employment, hourly wages, industry and occupation, etc.).
4. Adding an additional follow up interview at 9 or 12 months after entry into ATR would be beneficial. Since the ATR program is 6-months in duration, capturing outcomes data for some portion of the post-program period would help to measure and understand the longer-term impact of participation.

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Cronin, Jake (2011). The Path to Successful Reentry: The Relationship Between Correctional Education, Employment and Recidivism. Institute of Public Policy, Harry S. Truman School of Public Affairs: Truman Policy Research, Report 15-2011.
- <sup>5</sup> Logistical regression models were used as the estimation technique, providing estimates of the odds that an employed (vs. non-employed) ATR participant would fare better on the array of re-entry/ recovery outcomes. All reported results were found to be statistically significant at the 99% level.
- <sup>6</sup> Data on program completion were captured through a separate survey of CBI training and employment providers.
- <sup>7</sup> A more detailed net impact analysis of the impact of the CBI Program on employment using quasi-experimental techniques is currently underway.

## Participant Quote

“  
*This program has changed my life. I feel I have a purpose in life.*”

## Participant Quote

“  
*I gained confidence, and my anxiety was lifted for interviews. I feel I can gain a job in the field I have passion for.*”



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