



Good afternoon, Chairman and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. My name is Domenique Thornton, I work for the Mental Health Association of CT, Inc., (MHAC), a private non-profit dedicated to service, education and advocacy for people with mental health disabilities. The Association sponsors a program called the Choices Supportive Employment for persons with mental health disabilities that creates a restorative environment within which individuals can be helped to achieve or regain the confidence and skills necessary to choose, get and keep job opportunities in the community. Choices supportive employment offers individualized support in choosing, getting and keeping jobs in the competitive job market. Serving 30 persons annually, the program places participants in competitive employment. Job Coaches assist clients on the job on a one-to-one basis. Choices provides community support and allows individuals who have psychiatric disabilities to achieve or regain the confidence and skills necessary to choose, get, and keep supportive, competitive job opportunities in the community. Employment offers an excellent means to a productive and meaningful life in the community.

MHAC is aware that a past history of poor credit could be a barrier to future employment for our clients. We have not recently seen any issues related to people being refused employment because of poor credit. However, we believe as the job market tightens, more employers may be increasingly selective in doing credit checks. We can anticipate that some of the people we work with may be refused employment because of poor past credit histories due to their mental health issues. We assist with learning budgeting and banking skills, but the damage to their credit rating may already have been done. Persons with mental health disabilities are protected from discrimination in the area of employment, public accommodation and credit practices. In light of the state's interest in promoting employment, we believe that poor credit history due to a mental health issue should not be used to deny employment. Thank you.

Who We Are

The Mental Health Association of Connecticut, Inc. is a statewide, non-profit agency committed to the promotion of mental health, the prevention of mental illness and improved care and treatment of children and adults with mental health needs. Contributions, including membership dues, donations, bequests, and allocations from Connecticut Health Charities and the United Way support the mission and work of the Association.

While some people experience severe and persistent symptoms that require hospitalizations, the majority can lead productive and meaningful lives in the community.

Community Education

The Mental Health Association provides education programs on mental health issues for the public. Presentations are given to schools, churches and civic organizations about mental health and mental illness, and how to access needed services. This service helps reduce stigma and increase community acceptance of persons with mental illness.

Choices

Mission Statement

"Choices Work Services provides community support and creates a restorative environment within which individuals who have psychiatric disabilities can be helped to achieve or regain the confidence and skills necessary to choose, get, and keep supportive, competitive job opportunities in the community."

The Mental Health Association of Connecticut, Inc. offers Choices: a work service program in Waterbury. The program is based on the philosophy that everyone should be able to select what type of work they want to pursue. The program assists clients in assessing their job interests and skills, in identifying jobs in the community which match the clients interests and skills, and provides support on the job to ensure successful employment. Supportive employment hours are dependent on clients' work schedules which include evenings, weekends and holidays.

What We Do

Pre-Employment Services

Pre-Employment Services provide work experience to prepare those program participants who previously had little training and work experience to become competitively employed in the community. It includes a six-week course, which meets weekly to develop job and work readiness skills. While taking the course, clients gain work experience

through supportive unpaid employment. A job coach assists clients on the job on a one-to-one basis. When the program is completed, the client, staff and employer evaluate the progress that has been made, and the client either repeats the program or moves into the job market.

Supportive Employment

Supportive employment offers individualized support in choosing, getting and keeping jobs in the competitive job market. Services include: assessment of job skills, matching job skills with employer needs, and on the job support by job coaches as needed. Serving over 30 people with psychiatric disabilities, the program places participants in competitive employment. A job club meets monthly for employed clients to share the benefits of peer support. Guest speakers are frequently invited to the job club.

Choices Work Services...

- Provides employers skilled workers who are on time, consistent, and more than willing to work.
- Matches clients' interests to employers' needs, a combination that provides mutual success and profit.
- Clients are backed by highly skilled and professional job coaches.
- The program has an established track record of nearly twenty years of providing reliable people to area employers.