

## **JOBS Program**

The main objective of this program is to enhance productive job-seeking skills and self-confidence for the unemployed. Short-term goals include fortifying job seekers' ability to resist demoralization and to persist in the face of barriers and setbacks. The long term goal is to help persons seek employment in settings that maximize economic, social, and psychological rewards. The program contributes to the development of several social and emotional competencies, including: self-awareness, accurate self-assessment, and self-confidence; adaptability, self-control, and conscientiousness; empathy and organizational awareness; and influence, communication, and building bonds.

The JOBS program was developed by a group of psychologists associated with the Michigan Prevention Research Center, located at the University of Michigan. (The Prevention Research Center was involved because another goal of the program is to prevent depression and other psychological problems associated with unemployment.) Initially the program was implemented in the state of Michigan, with participants recruited from the Michigan Employment Security Commission. Since then the program has been adopted in several other states and foreign countries.

The original version of the program consisted of eight half-day sessions spanning two weeks. It later was shortened to five four-hour sessions. There are 15 to 20 participants in a session and two trainers, usually one male and one female. A unique feature of the program is that the trainers are also recruited from the ranks of the unemployed. They typically are counselors, teachers, and others who have high levels of certain social and emotional competencies themselves, including flexibility, empathy,

self-confidence, and positive outlook. They also have good speaking and listening skills, talent in giving feedback, skill in facilitating group process, and the ability to manage conflict constructively (Caplan, Vinokur, & Price, 1996; Price & Vinokur, 1995). After they are selected, the trainers go through seven weeks of training before they conduct any sessions.

The program relies heavily on active learning techniques such as modeling, role playing, and problem-solving. “Each session involves broad orienting introductions, dramatizations and modeling sessions in which trainers enact both successful and unsuccessful strategies at each stage of the job-search process.” There also are “specific exercises in which participants may test their newfound knowledge and their newly recognized skills in structured but supportive role-playing exercises” (Price & Vinokur, 1995, p. 200).

During the first part of the program, the trainers establish their credibility by discussing their own job-search experiences. Then they teach the participants to “think like an employer” and to identify their own marketable skills and to translate those skills into viable job and career options. Participants then learn how to present their skills effectively in phone contacts and job interviews, and they discuss how to deal with various barriers that they are likely to encounter in presenting their skills to an employer. The next stage of training teaches the participants how to engage in effective job-searches by tapping their personal networks and conducting informational interviews.

During the next phase of training, participants are “inoculated” against the inevitable setbacks they will encounter once they begin to use their new skills to look for jobs. The trainers do this by asking the participants to think about the setbacks, both

external and internal, that they are likely to encounter. Then the group identifies alternative solutions for dealing with each of these anticipated difficulties. In the last stage of the program, the participants enact an entire search strategy, including a job interview, and they receive supportive feedback and suggestions for improvement from the trainers and other participants.

The JOBS program has been evaluated through two large-scale, randomized field experiments. Compared to controls (who received an 8-page booklet with tips on how to find a new job), participants in the program consistently became re-employed more quickly, found higher quality jobs, and displayed better mental health outcomes (e.g., less clinical depression). For instance, at the time of a 4-month follow-up, 53 percent of the participants were re-employed compared to 29 percent of the control group. Results for a two-and-a-half year follow-up showed continued beneficial effects of the program on monthly earnings, level of employment, and episodes of job changes (Caplan, Vinokur, Price, & van Ryn, 1989). In addition, cost-benefit analyses show that the economic benefits of the program exceed its costs. Four weeks after the program ended, the participants were earning on average \$178 per month more than the controls. By four months their earnings were \$227 per month higher, and after two-and-a-half years they continued to earn \$239 per month more than the controls (Vinokur, van Ryn, Gramlich, & Price, 1991).

For more information about this program, see:

Caplan, R. D., Vinokur, A., D., & Price, R. H. (1996). From job loss to reemployment: Field experiments in prevention-focused coping. In G. W. Albee & T. P.

Gullota (Eds.), Primary prevention works: Issues in children's and families' lives (Vol. 6, pp. 341-379). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Caplan, R. D., Vinokur, A., Price, R. H., & van Ryn, M. (1989). Job seeking, reemployment, and mental health: A randomized field experiment in coping with job loss. Journal of Applied Psychology, *74*, 759-769.

Price, R. H., & Vinokur, A. D. (1995). Supporting career transitions in a time of organizational downsizing : The Michigan JOBS program. In M. London (Ed.), Employees, careers, and job creation (pp. 191-208). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Vinokur, A. D., van Ryn, M., Gramlich, E. M., & Price, R. H. (1991). Long-term follow-up and benefit-cost analysis of the JOBS program: A preventive intervention for the unemployed. Journal of Applied Psychology, *76*, 213-219.