



## **Claire Courtney, M.S., CRC**

Rehabilitation Program Specialist, Mental Health Advocate, Community Partner

If there's one thing Claire Courtney knows, it's what it takes for organizations to run successful employment programs: "strong support for employment services from the top down" and value around employment's role in recovery. She says Guild Incorporated has both.

Courtney's been with the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) since 1988 - long enough ago that memories of the early years, she readily admits, are a bit blurry. But, she does remember being contacted by President Grace Tangjerd Schmitt when Guild Incorporated was formed. "She asked for advice on how to start incorporating employment services because she had a core value around that," Courtney says.

It's a value that, in Courtney's view, has remained at Guild over many years and as the approach to providing employment services has changed. "In the beginning, the concept was that people would benefit from building support before working - the focus was on readiness, getting people ready to work," she says. "We've moved into the evidence-based practice of supported employment, and Guild has been right there with us."

Courtney oversees Guild Incorporated's fidelity reviews, which measure how well organizations are implementing 25 standards of Individual Placement Support (IPS) employment services. One of her favorite parts of the process is the opportunity to hear directly from

individuals served. "I've been very moved by hearing the difference that employment services have made in peoples' lives," she says. "I've been brought to tears."

Many of the successes have been so powerful, Courtney says, with individuals' permission, she's passed the stories on: one in particular to the Johnson & Johnson - Dartmouth Community Mental Health Program, which works to increase access to evidence-based supported employment. "Sometimes they will ask for stories and the first story from Minnesota was a story from Guild," she says. "That story is infused into the manual on how to do IPS employment - integrated into a training manual that's used nationally."

According to Courtney, lots of people need the kind and quality of employment services-integrating employment and mental health-that Guild Incorporated provides. She hopes Guild will be able to expand their reach further in the future: "We'll be looking to Guild to help guide the way as we look at doing this from the state level."

"Guild does things in a thoughtful way - keeping in the spirit of what they're trying to accomplish," Courtney says. "When you do things in this way, you can have phenomenal success."