

4. Consumer Empowerment: You are in Charge

Purpose of the Brochure:

Brochure 4 was designed to convey to the reader that they have both the right and the responsibility to make their own decisions about work, and to help the reader gain control over their rehabilitation process.

Group Objectives:

- build an understanding and develop a value for consumer empowerment and choice as relates to employment
- begin to practice being assertive about making choices

Suggested Activities:

- Discuss how is it harder and how is it easier to take charge of your own life. Using a blackboard or flip chart, make a list together of the “pros and cons” of making your own life decisions. What are the costs and rewards?
- Have individuals share a story (past or present or hypothetical) about a situation where choice/control was taken by someone else on their behalf—the individual can practice what they might like to say or do to change the situation. A variation is to let the group offer suggestions for ways to change the situation, and then let the individual consider and /or practice those strategies. If the group is trusting enough, you might even role-play the interaction.
- Invite a local consumer advocate or activist to come speak to your group about consumer empowerment or rights.
- Role-play a situation in which a well-intentioned service provider is making too many decisions for a consumer/client. Give participants the opportunity to practice asserting their leadership of their own vocational plan.
- Role-play a situation in which the participant needs to assert control of their own vocational plan with a family member or friend.

Suggested Discussion Questions:

- What are some ways you have taken charge of your own life decisions, treatment, rehabilitation, etc.?
- What are some aspects of your life in which you would like to have more control and/or input? Who is currently making the decisions? What might you do to change the situation?
- Think about how you are currently making decisions about work. Who is helping you? Are they helping you to make choices, or are they making choices for you? How do you feel about the situation?
- Review the list on page 7. Can you think of any examples of people who help you in ways that are suggested here?
- Have you ever been involved in any consumer advocacy or activist organizations or consumer-run programs or clubhouses? What was it like? Did it help you to feel more empowered? How so?