

Mentally ill find tight job market

Second in a two-part series on mental illness.

By Lucy Lien

Even if you are a healthy, acceptable community member with salable job skills, with the unemployment rate at 5 per cent, it's difficult finding a job.

If you have been mentally ill, and especially if you have been hospitalized for your illness, your difficulties in finding work may be doubled or tripled. You will have to fight a stigma of being "a crazy," may not have salable job skills, and may not have social skills needed to get contacts.

The stresses of finding a job will just add to your stresses in finding friends and killing boredom.

In seeking out a job you will have to go through not only the usual problems in job interviewing, but will also have to conquer employer prejudice against a former mental patient.

Prejudice Obvious

An employment counselor at the State Employment Agency said that there is obvious prejudice against former mental patients. These feelings come out more openly, she said, "in times like right now, with so many people seeking work."

She said that one bad experience with a former patient can ruin an employer's willingness to hire any other ex-patients. Many times the employer believes "the patients will have a fit or something," she said. This prejudice is almost entirely unjustified, she said.

The label of mentally ill on a person often makes employers cautious about hiring that person. Job adjustment problems after hiring, said Ellie Shore, a Nebraska vocational rehabilitation counselor, are not nearly as great as the initial hardship of conquering discrimination.

Even after a patient has been hired, she said, he may be under more pressure and watched more closely than an average worker.

"Employers must become more understanding, must take more risks," she said, "And any risks they take are all in their own minds."

"I sometimes wonder," she said, "if after they get the job they won't be watched like a bomb about to go off."

Stigma Exists

Sometimes the stigma against the ex-patient may be in his own mind, according to Charles Richardson, M.D., director of the Lincoln-Lancaster mental health clinic.

There probably is some stigma, he said, but it may be justified. "If I was hiring a secretary who's records indicated that he or she became ill frequently I would hesitate about hiring that person."

He said, "there is undoubtedly a tendency to see mental illness as dangerous. When talking to potential employers, the question often comes up, 'Is he dangerous?'"

However, a patient often prejudices his own case, he said. Frequently ex-patients lack confidence in their own abilities.

"Too often," he said, "Ex-patients go into interviews flat and unspontaneous. Too often the fact of former hospitalization is used as a rationalization for the fact that they can't get a job."

He said, "patients may put everything into the basket of 'I couldn't find a job because I was an ex-mental patient,' rather than acknowledging that he hasn't shaved or has bad breath. If I can develop a comfortable excuse for my shortcomings, I'm going to be rather reluctant to give it up."

Job Training

Also, many former patients may have trouble finding a job, not specifically because of suspected or actual employer prejudice, but because of conditions related to their illness. They may be retarded, physically handicapped, or lack the emotional stability necessary to hold down well-paying and responsible jobs.

Patients who have not obtained job skills prior to hospitalization may receive some vocational training from the Nebraska Vocational Re-

habilitation program (voc. rehab).

According to J. Michael Sprague, director of voc rehab at the Lincoln Regional Center, there are some funds available for patients who wish to complete their high school education or to receive further education in business or computer schools. Limited funds are available if a patient wishes to attend college classes.

Patients may also receive training in home management training courses in cooking,

sewing and laundry.

Low-skilled Training

The job training that most patients receive, he said, is for low-skilled jobs. For one thing, many patients lack the emotional or intelligence levels needed for highly skilled jobs.

In addition, Sprague said, the two most successful areas in which to find jobs are in food service and janitorial work. As a result, most patients at the regional centers receive training in these two areas.

The only sheltered workshop (for mental patients) in the state is at the Lincoln Regional Center. Here patients may work at a hair clip factory. The work is basically assembly and production work, where patients place hair clips on cards, count up cards and work in the shipping area.

Patients working at the sheltered workshop are paid according to how much work is done and according to the minimum wage.

Patients may also develop job skills by working at the canteen on the grounds, but this work is unpaid.

Although job training is also available for patients coming to local health clinics, it is not usually needed with these patients. Many of these patients have received their job skills elsewhere.

Adjustment Problems

Ms. Shore noted that with the out-patients the problem is not so much with the lack of skills, but with the need for adjustments. "They might have janitorial skills but not know things such as that they should not talk loudly on the job," she said.

Mildred Katz, director of volunteer services at the Lincoln Lancaster Clinic, said that "the more skills a person has, whether they're social or job skills, the easier it would be for her or she to move back into the community."

Patients, especially at the clinics, do receive counseling in grooming and social skills.

If the patient has good social skills, and if he "has good job skills," said Mrs. Katz, "he or she would be able to get any job, (as long as he doesn't run for vice president)."

Even if a patient can find a job, however, he may not be able to find the job he wants.

Discrimination

At this time, Tom Matthews, (names of patients have been changed) is fighting federal discrimination through the Nebraska Civil Liberties Union (NCLU). Although he was offered another job by the federal government, because of his past mental history he was fired from the job he once held and desired to keep.

The job, as a federal protective officer, requires the wearing of a gun. Hunter's mental illness, however, shows a history of depression. There was no history of hallucinations, irrational behavior or violence. In addition, his psychiatrist has told him that he is now in good mental health.

He said that he had held a government job with the Department of Agriculture (USDA) before being offered the protective officer job and he had always been open about his former illness when applying for jobs.

When the government fired him from the officer job on the grounds of his past illness, he appealed his firing, and was only then told he could have another federal job as long as it didn't require the handling of a gun.

(Continued on Page 3)



In the hot weather, one woman found relief by wading on a sidewalk that had just been sprinkled.

Fund set up for memorial

A scholarship fund in honor of a pioneer Pawnee County couple, the late John and Ruth Goodrich Tomek, has been established at the University of Nebraska Foundation by their son, Dr. William G. Tomek, professor of agricultural economics at Cornell University, Ithaca, N.Y.

Preference will be given to students from Pawnee and Custer Counties.

Professor Tomek said he was endowing a memorial scholarship "because of the strong support my parents gave me in obtaining a college education and the substantial debt I feel I owe to the University of Nebraska."

His mother was born in Sargent in 1894 and died in Pawnee City in 1954. His father, a native of Czechoslovakia, died in Lincoln in 1973, after spending 80 years of his life in and near Table Rock.

Dr. Tomek earned his Bachelor's degree in 1956 and his Master of Arts degree in 1957, both in agricultural economics from the University.

Mellerdrummer tryouts to be held

Theatre Inc. of Lincoln will hold open tryouts for its fourth and final Mellerdrummer of the season at The Gas Light Theatre, 322 South 9th Street, Lincoln, Nebraska on Monday and Tuesday, July 8 and 9 from 6:00 till 9:00 p.m.

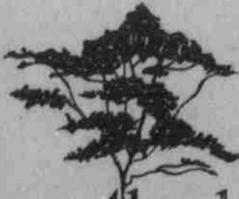
This is a musical entitled "No Sooner Won Than Wed".

241 sale

TWO FOR THE PRICE OF ONE

WITH ANY PURCHASE OF \$3.00 OR MORE, YOU CAN SELECT AN EQUIVALENT AMOUNT OF MERCHANDISE FREE! SELECT FROM ANYTHING IN THE STORE.

JULY 2 & 3 ONLY (Tues. & Wed.)



Akademia
1127 R A Reference & Professional Book Shop

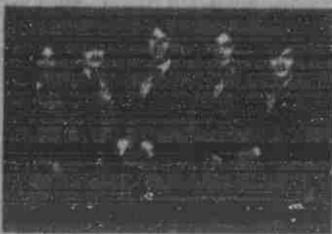
**NOW
Little Bo West**

—this week only—

Great Rock Show

ENGLISH FROST

July 8—20



PEACE & LOVE



SNAKE & the ARMPITS