

Research Centre for Social Innovation

Studies on inclusion, safety and justice

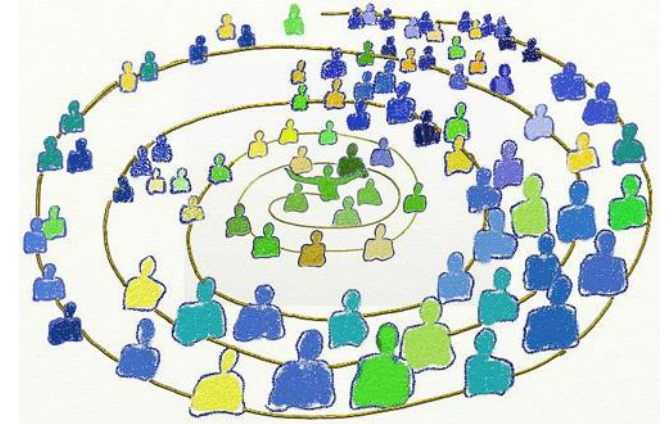


Recovery-Oriented Job Coaching

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Introduction

- Dutch **decentralization reforms** in 2015
- Aim: support closer to people. **Stronger alignment** with people's everyday lives, social networks, and neighborhoods;
 - Emergence of community-based teams,
 - Integrated care / cross-domain collaboration
- Reality in 2026: care, welfare and re-integration remain **separated domains**
- **High pressure** to find work for people in vulnerable labour market positions
- **Mutual distrust:** institutions do not trust clients, and vice versa



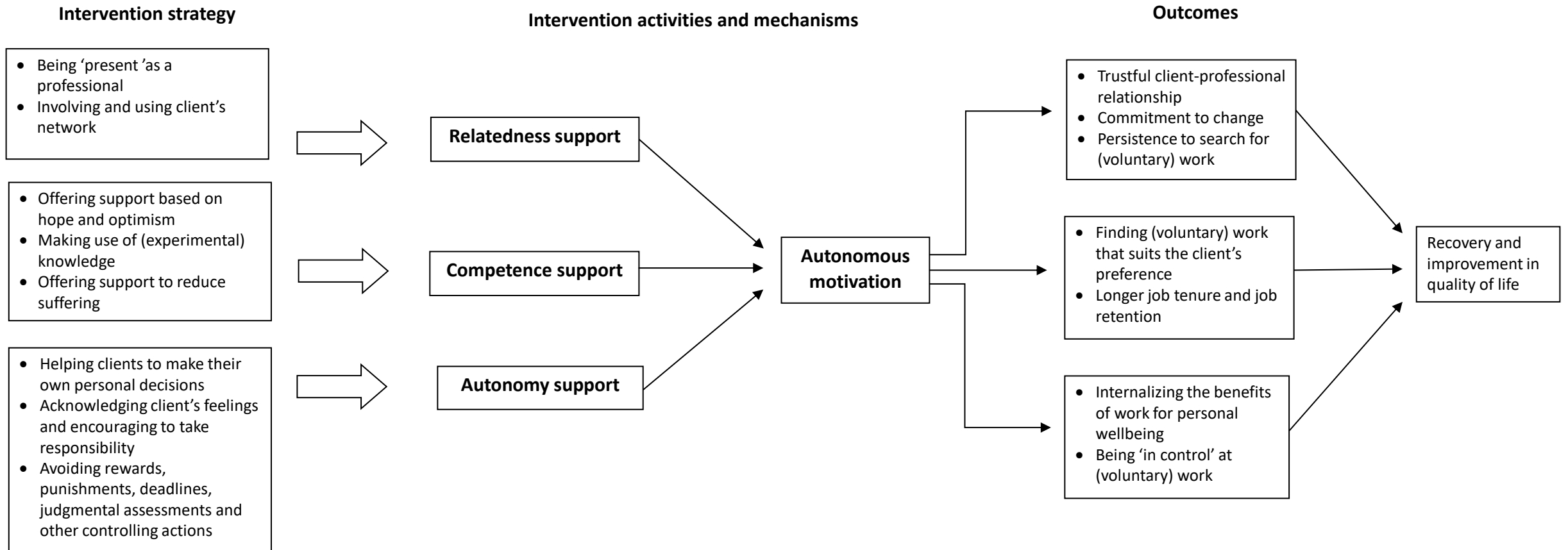
This study

- **Focus:** job coaching for people with severe mental vulnerability
- **Setting:** supported housing organization (Utrecht)
- **Method:** realist evaluation: focus on the underlying mechanisms
 - Clients (n=24), Job coaches (n=15), Focus groups
- **Research questions:** What works, for whom, and why?
 - *How do job coaches align their support with clients' needs? What keeps them motivated?*
 - *To what extent is the “place then train” and “zero exclusion” principle applied?*
 - *What do job coaches perceive as a successful trajectory: (finding (paid) work and/ or recovery progress?*

Findings

- **Each trajectory is tailored** and built on **long-term relationships** (high contrast with traditional reintegration approaches)
- Framework: **Self-Determination Theory** (Ryan & Deci 2000)
 - Autonomy: Supporting own choices, own pace, broad life domains, building readiness
 - Competence: Focus on wishes, small steps, addressing stigma, positive feedback
 - Relatedness: Support based on equality, 'being present', acting as a liaison
- Strong overlap with **recovery principles** (Mancini 2008)
- Individual placement and support (IPS) was used only in a small amount of cases

Findings



Recovery oriented approach to job coaching

- Strong **working alliance**
- Job coaches continuously work on an **egalitarian, trust-based relationship**: a personal-professional relationship in which clients feel 'seen' and at ease (Wilken, 2010)
- Attention to **broader aspects** of life
- This way: Job coaches give clients the space to grow, **strengthen** themselves, and increase their **autonomy**
- Building relationship as key mechanism for change

A broader scope

- Findings show a strong overlap with SRH / CARE
- Shift from linear way of thinking towards more relational approach
- Work needs to be perceived within life context
- Broader scope = more effective
- SRH adds to IPS:
 - Exploring multiple life domains
 - Relational approach
 - Focus on meaningful & personal goals

IPS Principles

1. Focus on competitive employment
2. Zero exclusion
3. Integration of vocational services and mental health care
4. Client preferences are leading
5. Support around work and income
6. Rapid job search and placement
7. Job development
8. Time-unlimited support

CARe Principles

Working from a personal recovery perspective (a meaningful life)

Everyone has potential and deserves opportunities (inclusion and hope)

Coherence across life domains (housing, wellbeing, work, social relationships)

Starting from the client's wishes, needs, and autonomy

Practical and emotional support within the client's everyday life context

Working in small steps, tailored to the client's pace and situation

Enhancing strengths, capabilities, and social networks

Continuity of relationship and long-term support (presence and commitment)

Rethinking work and participation

- We need to broaden concept of “work”, a shift towards participation-focused policies.
- Value multiple forms of participation (voluntary work, peer work social enterprise) can improve recovery and health.
- In the Dutch / European context:
 - Welfare systems influence incentives (paid work does not always ‘pay off’ financially)
 - Situation of benefit recipients is getting more complex (Divosa Benchmark 2025)
 - Meaning: paid work is no immediate solution (other problems need to be addressed too)

Discussion

Does this resonate with your own practice?

Let's stay in touch!



Binkhorst J, Dijkers J, Blonk R, van Veldhoven M (2026) Tailored job coaching for people with severe mental illness living in supported housing settings: A realist approach. PLoS One 21(3): e0343044.
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