



Strengths AI Cannot Match

A Flourish@Work Pilot Program
Centering Lived Experience of Workers
with Serious Mental Illness

On May 19, 2026, One Mind debuted pilot programming for Flourish@Work, a program focused on workplace empowerment for workers with lived experience of serious mental illness (SMI) at the 2026 One Mind at Work Global Forum in Napa California. In this pilot intervention, employers from organizations of all sizes deepened their knowledge of the most vital issues facing talented and dedicated workers living with SMIs. The workshop focused on three components: highlighting the unique strengths of this population, sharing personal stories of success and growth from workers with lived experience, and inviting reflection by asking employers to “put themselves in the shoes” of workers with SMIs. These components culminated in an engaging facilitated discussion, leading to a new direction in supporting and empowering workers with SMIs.





HIGHLIGHTING UNIQUE STRENGTHS

One Mind's own Chief Advocacy and Engagement Officer, Brandon Staglin shared how, even while living with schizophrenia, his tenacity and attention to detail set him apart from other employees early in his career, and how reframing this difference as a strength can be empowering. Participants learned how the unique experiences of individuals with SMIs provide a foundation of strengths such as empathy, clarity of vision, creative thinking, and organizational loyalty.

SHARING STORIES OF SUCCESS & GROWTH

Flourish@Work Storytellers shared their experiences thriving in the workplace, as well as lessons learned from workplaces where flourishing was not supported. Participants learned of the crucial importance of strong leadership, of having representation of lived experience in leadership, and of moving beyond statements and into action. Storytellers shared about both the difficulty and importance of disclosure in helping workers thrive, as well as the value of being able to show up as their authentic selves. The stories spoke to a vision of flourishing, where workers with SMIs can engage with meaningful work and excel both personally and professionally.

INVITING REFLECTION THROUGH EMPATHY

Employers were asked to roleplay a conversation about work capacity either with or as an employee with an undisclosed health condition. Participants shared their surprise at their own difficulty in navigating this activity, citing unanticipated discomfort in attempting to advocate for themselves while uncovering shortcomings in their own concepts of supportive and thriving workplaces for workers with serious mental illness.



KEY IMPACTS

23%

increase in confidence that workers with SMIs could thrive within their organizations

Attitudes Shifted as Intended

By measuring attendee beliefs and attitudes both before and after the pilot program, Flourish@Work was able to measure the program's impact in real time. Notably, employers' confidence that when properly supported, workers with SMIs could thrive within their respective organizations grew by 23%. Participants learned how crucial visibility can be for workers with SMIs: employers' belief in the importance of safe disclosure grew by 28%.

28%

increase in belief in the importance of safe disclosure

Unexpected Benefits

Participants also connected the discussion of thriving in the workplace to concepts of recovery from serious mental illness, an implied piece of program development that the presenters did not make explicit. The ability of participants to draw this connection was an exciting and unexpected discovery in this pilot program. Intriguingly, the program led to a robust discussion on the artificial distinction between "mental illness" and "mental wellness", and the stigmatizing belief that the two concepts are mutually exclusive. Participants' recognition that employers can support the mental wellness of individuals living with mental illness underscored the burgeoning shift in beliefs around best practices in supporting workers with SMIs.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

While the workshop had an impact on attendees, there are opportunities to grow its capacity to shift culture. Notably, attendees shared that they would like more time to interact with the storytellers, and to get feedback on their thought processes as they shifted. **A longer discussion session would enable participants to both grow in their familiarity with individuals with serious mental illness and in their confidence in their own ability to support such workers.** As both unanticipated learnings have demonstrated, the program shows potential to highlight a new vision of mental wellness, one where fulfilling, career-oriented employment can play a significant role. Future programming could include a **stronger focus on employment as a tool towards recovery** to better support these learnings. In this stage of program development, the more intimate size of the Global Forum Workshop audience was an ideal setting to foster vulnerable and productive dialogue, though a **larger audience may enable more robust and diverse facilitated discussion.**

NEXT STEPS

The One Mind Lived Experience team will collaborate with the Lived Experience Council and One Mind at Work to build on the learnings from this successful pilot to develop the complete Flourish@Work Program.

Consisting of three elements: **Curriculum, Coaching and Community**, the full Flourish@Work program will premiere as a component of One Mind at Work member programming in 2027.

