



A Quarterly Newsletter Produced by the Rural Institute Transition Projects

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Vocational Rehabilitation as a Partner in Transition: Bridging the Gap between School and Work

Barb Schiedermayer, Transition Counselor

The ideal transition for youth with disabilities would be to graduate from high school one day and to begin the next day in the setting of their choice: college, job corps, work, independent living. The idea is that youth would move seamlessly from school to adult life without a long gap in supports or activities. Unfortunately, the data reveal that this isn't happening. According to the 2004 Harris Survey of Americans with Disabilities, twice as many youth with disabilities drop out of high school as their non-disabled peers. Students with disabilities go on to college at half the rate, and are employed at roughly one third the rate of their non-disabled peers. As the research tells us, there is a dismal gap between the reality and the ideal. We should not despair, however, as help is available. The public Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, in coordination with the school and other community resources, can help students with disabilities successfully bridge the gap.

How can VR help?

VR helps eligible youth with disabilities prepare for, get and keep jobs compatible with their interests, abilities, capabilities, resources, and priorities.

To begin, VR helps youth identify their post high school goals. For each

person, this process can be initiated by asking the following questions: Where will I live after graduation? What kind of work do I want to do? What kind of education or training do I need to get the job of my choice? How will I get to work or school?

Planning one's vocational future is similar to planning for a trip. Just as a traveler must identify her destination before she can identify what to pack, a student must identify his vocational goal before he'll know what services he'll require to help him achieve his goal. For example, if a traveler is headed to Hawaii, a snorkel and swim fins are a necessity, but would only take up space in her suitcase if she were headed to Antarctica. Likewise, if a student wants to be a teacher, classroom training is a necessity, but would not be necessary for an individual who wants to work as a cashier, a skill that can be acquired on the job.

Another way to help youth with disabilities begin this planning process is to ask them to think about how their days look now and what services they already have in place in their school or work environments. If they think that they might need these supports after high school, Vocational Rehabilitation might be able to help.

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Resources

State of Montana Vocational Rehabilitation
<http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/dsd/vrs/index.shtml>

Montana Association for Rehabilitation
www.mtmar.org

University of Montana's Rural Institute Transition Projects
<http://ruralinstitute.umn.edu/transition/>

Montana Council on Developmental Disabilities
<http://www.mtcdd.org/>

We value your opinion. To provide feedback to us about this newsletter and our other products, please take our quick online survey at:
<http://www.surveygizmo.com/s/58441/transition-projects-feedback>

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Vocational Rehabilitation as a Partner ..., cont.

Who is eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services?

To be eligible for services, an individual must meet the following criteria: 1) he has a physical or mental disability that 2) prevents his ability to independently prepare for, get and keep a job, and 3) he requires services to remove barriers to employment. Individuals who receive either Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) are presumed eligible for services.

When can Vocational Rehabilitation get involved?

A formal application for services can be taken shortly before or during the student's exit year, which is the year he or she plans to graduate. So a student can apply for services during the spring or summer before her exit year, or during her exit year.

Before a formal application is taken, however, students and their support team members are encouraged to contact VR as early as they'd like—as soon as middle school even—to gather information about the VR services that may be available to the student in the future. Research demonstrates that the sooner we “talk transitions,” the better the students' outcomes will be. Thus, prior to application, VR counselors serve as consultants, answering questions and providing information that will help with planning.

What kind of services does Vocational Rehabilitation provide?

The types of services provided are based on what an individual actually requires to prepare for, get and keep a job. Together, with their VR counselors, eligible consumers will develop Individualized Plans of Employment (IPE) outlining identified services, which may include:

Evaluation Services

These services are geared to help individuals understand their interests, abilities, and limitations so that they

can select suitable vocational goals. There are a variety of evaluation services. A *Work Assessment*, for example, may be used to evaluate a person's ability to learn and retain new work skills as well as his work behaviors, including his ability to get to work on time, get along with others, and take direction from his supervisor. A *Vocational Evaluation* may be used to help a person identify her specific work interests and aptitudes. A *Psychological Evaluation* may be used to help an individual living with a learning disability, for example, identify effective learning strategies necessary to achieve success in postsecondary education.

Career Guidance and Counseling Services

Career Guidance helps individuals match their vocational abilities and interests with the needs of the labor market. *Counseling*, on the other hand, helps people to understand their disabilities, to adjust to the influence their disability has on their lives, and to develop self-advocacy and coping skills.

Medical and Psychological Services

These services are provided to help persons with disabilities become more employable. Physical therapy, for example, is a medical service that may be provided to help a person increase his physical endurance for work. Psychotherapy may be provided to remove psychological barriers that interfere with one's ability to get and/or keep a job.

Job Development and Placement Services

Job Development, often conducted by a hired job placement specialist, includes contacting employers on behalf of individuals with disabilities to identify, negotiate or create jobs that match their abilities and interests with the needs of the employer. Relative to *Placement Services*, again, VR may hire a job placement specialist to provide structure and support to a person with a disability during a job

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Resources

Parents, Let's Unite for Kids (PLUK)

<http://www.pluk.org/>

Administration on Developmental Disabilities Youth Information, Training and Resource Centers

<http://www.addvdc.org>

Vocational Rehabilitation Service Projects for American Indians with Disabilities

<http://www.canar.org/map/stateMontana.asp?sh=hide>

Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA)

<http://www.opi.state.mt.us/PDF/SpecED/transi/LaborIssues.pdf>

Conference

Montana Association for Rehabilitation

51st Annual Conference

October 1-3, 2008

Red Lion Hotel at Kalispell Center Mall

in Kalispell MT

<http://www.mtmar.org>



Vocational Rehabilitation as a Partner ..., cont.

search. For example, the individual may meet with the job placement assistant once per week to receive help updating resumes, identifying potential employers, completing job applications, and practicing interview skills.

Training Services

There are various methods of training that are used to increase the employment skills of individuals with disabilities. In *On-the-Job Training*, VR pays a percentage of an employee's wage as an incentive to an employer who, in return, hires the individual and trains him or her in a specific job skill.

Assistance toward the costs of *classroom training* in college, a vocational technical school, or a trade school may be provided if such training is a requirement of one's chosen profession.

Sometimes individuals require one-to-one assistance to learn and retain new work skills. This level of assistance—*job coaching*—is provided by a skilled job coach.

Supported Employment and Extended Employment Services

Some individuals with disabilities require only limited supports to prepare for, get, and keep their jobs. While others, with more significant disabilities, may require on-going and intermittent support. The Supported and Extended Employment programs work hand in hand; in the *Supported Employment* program, job coaches help individuals *get* jobs, while in the *Extended*

Employment program job coaches helps them *keep* jobs.

Rehabilitation Technology Services

The purpose of these services is to help individuals with disabilities identify and obtain adaptive equipment necessary to perform the essential functions of a job. In some instances, the employer, in consultation with the employee and under the guidance of the Americans with Disabilities Act, may provide accommodations.

Post Employment Services

On occasion, an individual with a disability who is already employed may encounter a disability-related problem that may interfere with his ability to keep his job. The VR agency encourages the individual for whom this may occur to reapply so that a case can be reopened and assistance provided to prevent job loss.

Resource Referral

While the public VR program offers a wide variety of services, it does not provide everything that an individual may require. Therefore, VR counselors stay abreast of additional community resources and refer their clients accordingly. For instance, a VR counselor may refer an individual who is without housing to the local housing shelter and to the state Housing Authority.

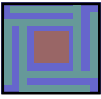
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The Vocational Rehabilitation Process

From the perspective of an applicant, the process can be described in the following steps:

1. **Make an appointment.** While self-reliance is encouraged, anyone can make an appointment on behalf of an applicant, including the parent of a dependent student. Applicants are encouraged to bring along medical, psychological, educational, and vocational information to their appointments.
2. **Complete the application.** After services and rights are explained, the applicant will be asked to describe 1) how her disability is a barrier to employment, 2) her academic and work histories, 3) her interests and goals, and 4) what resources she has available to help her achieve her goals, if any.
3. **Await eligibility determination.** Counselors are required to make an eligibility decision and notify the applicant of that decision within 60 days of the date of application. Eligibility is presumed for those who receive Social Security Benefits.
4. **Undergo evaluation.** To ensure the selection of a suitable vocational goal and the proper identification of services necessary to achieve the goal, an individual may participate in assessment activities such as those previously described.
5. **Develop an Individual Plan of Employment.** The IPE must be written within 120 days of eligibility determination. The plan serves as a road map to one's desired employment goal. It includes a list of services and activities necessary to accomplish the goal, and an estimated goal completion date.
6. **Undergo progress reviews.** To ensure accomplishment of the goal, the client and the VR counselor meet on a regular basis to review progress and solve potential problems until the employment goal is achieved. Once employed, the individual's case remains open for an additional 90 days to ensure his success.



Questions and Answers About Vocational Rehabilitation

Question: How and when do you determine that someone needs Extended Employment services?

Answer: Extended Employment (EE) services are recommended when an individual, who has had sufficient opportunity to try work, demonstrates that she is unable to learn, retain, and perform essential work skills and appropriate work behaviors on an independent basis (without the ongoing support of a job coach).

Question: If someone is determined to need Extended Employment services, then what happens? If there is a waiting list for Extended Employment are there alternative ways to access the support someone needs to work?

Answer: If EE services are recommended, but there is not sufficient funding available, the individual's name will be added to the VR Extended Employment waiting list. Alternate resources to fund extended employment services may be available. For those eligible for the Developmental Disabilities program, Community Supports Funds or House Bill 195 Funds may be possible funding sources. For those receiving Social Security benefits, Impairment-Related Work Expenses (IRWEs), or Plans to Achieve Self-Support (PASS), may be possible avenues of funding. Lastly, some families may elect to pay for services until future funding is available.

Question: When can VR get involved with students?

Answer: VR can provide consultation services to students, families, and school staff as early as middle school. Consultation services can be provided in an IEP meeting or in a private meeting with the student and her support team. Applications for services, beyond consultation, can be taken as early as the spring semester preceding the student's exit year.

Question: Could somebody be seen as too disabled to be served by VR?

Answer: No. Anyone who is interested in work has the right to explore employment opportunities.

Question: What is the difference between the Vocational Rehabilitation Program and the Developmental Disabilities (DD) Program?

Answer: Whereas VR serves eligible individuals who live with all types of disabilities, the DD program serves only those who live with developmental disabilities. While VR services are time-limited and strictly focused on employment, DD services are life-long and cover multiple areas of life, including residential services and family support services.

Question: Will VR pay for any service or item that would make someone employable or more employable?

Answer: No. The service or item must be disability related and required (not just desired) for the person to reach his or her stated employment goal.

Question: What if a person with a disability found a job on her own, but because of her disability, she was unable to find a better, more career-oriented job? Could VR help?

Answer: If it is determined that the eligible individual is underemployed—her disability impedes her ability to achieve a vocational goal equal to her potential—VR may provide assistance.

Question: Can students with learning disabilities or emotional disabilities qualify for VR services?

Answer: Yes, as long as they meet the qualifications stated on page 2.

Question: If VR approves funding for me to receive services through a community rehabilitation provider (e.g., Job Placement Agency), how do I decide which agency to use?

Answer: VR counselors provide their clients with information about local community rehabilitation providers through written agency brochures and/or actual face-to-face meetings with the providers. Clients are encouraged to choose a provider with whom they feel comfortable.

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Question and Answers, cont.

Question: Our family just moved here from Wyoming. My son (a high school senior) was being served by VR there. Will he automatically qualify for VR services in Montana?

Answer: Eligibility is not automatic. He will need to reapply. However, it is likely that he will qualify since the eligibility requirements are consistent across the country.

Question: My Social Security case worker mentioned something about Section 301 for when I turn 18 and my SSI eligibility is reexamined. She said it had to do with VR. What is it?

Answer: People who receive Social Security benefits are exempt from Social Security re-determination reviews while they are actively involved in an Individualized Plan of Employment (IPE).

Question: I want to pursue self-employment as my vocational goal. What will VR require in order for me to receive VR funding and support for my endeavor?

Answer: Through a written business plan, you will need to provide evidence that your business idea is feasible; that is, it must be demonstrated that people will buy the service or product you plan to sell, that you have the ability to effectively manage a business, and that your business will generate enough income for you to support yourself. That amount will differ for each business owner. If you need assistance in completing your business plan, VR will refer you to business experts who can provide professional guidance. VR may assist with the costs incurred for professional consultation and guidance.

Question: Is Montana VR using "Order of Selection"? If so, can you please describe it?

Answer: As of this writing, Montana has not moved into an Order of Selection status. For states who are having difficulty meeting the needs of all clients, Order of Selection was introduced to ensure that people with the most significant disabilities are served first.

Question: If I'm blind, do I need to apply for both VR and Blind/Low Vision services?

Answer: No. You would apply to the Blind and Low Vision Services program only.

Question: I'm a student with a disability. Why should I bother involving VR in my transition planning? That is, what's in it for me, besides another adult telling me what I should do with my life?

Answer: Good question! VR can provide a wide variety of services to help you achieve your vocational goal, including funding for job placement assistance or education expenses.

Question: What can schools, students and families do to prepare before youth graduate to make the most of services from VR?

Answer: Students are encouraged to participate in their schools' vocational preparation programs to acquire valuable work experience. Also, as noted above, students and their support teams are encouraged to contact their local VR offices to ask questions. We look forward to their calls!



To locate the nearest Vocational Rehabilitation office in Montana:
1-877-296-1197 (toll-free consumer line)
(406) 444-2590 (voice/TTY)
www.dphhs.mt.gov/dsd/vrs/index.shtml

Training Calendar

Web Conferences

The audio portion of the Web conferences can be accessed from any telephone and the video portion from a computer with Internet access. There is no cost for any of the sessions.

Youth Track – designed for young people with disabilities, their families, and those who provide services to these youth and families. **All sessions take place from 1:00pm - 2:30 pm Mountain Time.**

Oct. 6 - Disability History

Dec. 1 - Transition and Personal Care Services

Jan. 2 - Adult DD Service Providers – Who are they and what do they do?

Apr. 6 - After Graduation – Ideas for Rich, Full Days

Jun. 1 - Creative Housing Options

Aug. 3 - Self-Awareness, Self-Advocacy and Self-Determination

Customized Employment Track – designed for teams that will be implementing Customized Employment with students and other job seekers...there will be homework between sessions. Due to the intensity of the support that will be provided for each team, applications to participate will be required and a limited number of teams will be selected. **All sessions take place from 1:00pm - 3:00 pm Mountain Time.**

Nov. 3 - An Overview of Customized Employment

Nov. 7 - The Process of Discovery

Jan. 5 - The Vocational Profile

Feb. 16 - Customized Planning Meeting

Mar. 16 - Representational Portfolio

Apr. 20 - Job Development and Negotiation

Session fliers and registration information will be sent to Montana Transition Listserv members. To join the Montana Transition Listserv, send your email address to [Kim Brown](mailto:Kim.Brown@mt.gov). Fliers may also be downloaded from the Transition Projects Web site as they become available. Audio recordings of conferences that have already taken place may be downloaded from the Rural Institute Transition Projects and PLUK Web sites: <http://ruralinstitute.umt.edu/transition> <http://www.pluk.org>



Case Studies

Rick

Rick is a 17-year-old high school senior who lives with a developmental disability. He applied for services with the Montana Developmental Disabilities Program, was determined eligible and has been placed on the waiting list for employment and residential services. He also applied for VR services and began receiving the following:

Evaluation: VR contracted with Work Solutions, a local employment vendor, to develop a community-based work assessment to evaluate Rick's abilities, support needs and interests. Per Rick's expressed interest, the provider was able to develop a work assessment at Staggering Ox Sandwiches. Through this work experience, Rick demonstrated that he learned new tasks and routines with several days of instruction, and that it helped if only one new task was presented at a time. During the first three weeks of the work assessment, Rick joked and interacted with his supervisor and coworkers, and they found him to be likeable and pleasant. Although Rick had previously demonstrated that he knew the tasks and routine by consistent, accurate performance, he began kicking trash cans and not moving from one task to the next independently. As a result, his production and quality decreased significantly. Further inquiry revealed that other supervisors were giving Rick multi-step instructions, which caused him confusion and frustration. Consequently, it was decided that the assessment site was not a good match for Rick.

Evaluation: Given the less-than-favorable situation noted above, a second work assessment was developed to answer the following questions: "Does Rick need Extended Employment services to keep his job?" or "If the job is a good match and there are strong natural supports in place (e.g., a supportive supervisor), will Rick require only limited assistance to learn his new job duties and routine?" After gathering more information about Rick's interests and skills, the Job Developer negotiated a work experience at a local car dealership. In consultation with the employment consultant, the supervisor trained Rick, who learned his tasks quickly. Neither the supervisor nor the employment consultant observed any of the maladaptive behaviors Rick had exhibited at Staggering Ox. Thus, it was concluded that Rick didn't need Supported and Extended Employment; he would be successful with some time-limited training services.

Following a month-long work assessment, Rick was hired and began working 10 hours a week. After graduating, he presented his diploma to the manager and stated that he would like additional hours. He has worked an average of 20 hours a week for the past four years, relying on occasional support from his family and coworkers. His case was closed after he was stable in his paid job for 90 days. A few months after the case was closed, the employer requested additional assistance to help Rick learn a new job duty. VR reopened Rick's case and funded additional training through the **Post Employment Services** program.

Jake

Jake is a high school senior who lives with dyslexia and a below-the-knee amputation of his left leg. Jake reported a desire to work with diesel engines.

Evaluation: VR funded a variety of assessments to help Jake make an informed choice regarding his vocational goal. The assessments included: 1) a vocational evaluation to help Jake further explore his interests and abilities, 2) a functional capacity evaluation to help him evaluate whether or not he can safely perform the work of a diesel mechanic, and 3) a psychological evaluation to identify learning strategies to help him overcome the barriers related to his learning disability. These evaluations showed that Jake is a perseverant guy who describes himself as a "motor head." Jake loves working on engines and has not let his disabilities get in the way. He demonstrated strong mechanical aptitudes. He is physically fit and can endure standing and walking despite his amputation. However, physical therapy was recommended to help him build strength and avoid injury to his supportive leg. Jake struggles to read written print and learns best with auditory input. Likewise, it was recommended that Jake use textbooks on tape.

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Case Studies, cont.

Career Guidance and Counseling: Jake participated in a work experience at a mechanic's shop to enable him to become more familiar with the various job duties and physical demands of diesel mechanics. Following his experience, he chose Diesel Mechanic as his career goal.

Vocational Training: VR funded Jake's tuition, books and tools that weren't covered by financial aid for Diesel Mechanic training. VR paid for the physical therapy recommended in the above-noted functional capacity evaluation.

Rehabilitation Technology: VR purchased a loaner computer and screen reader software to help Jake with his course work. They also purchased a rubber mat and a tool cart for his work site.

Job Placement Assistance: Following graduation from mechanic school, VR hired a job placement specialist to provide structure and support during Jake's job search.

Worksite Ergonomic Assessment: Once he was on the job, VR funded this assessment to identify possible work station modifications or equipment that would help Jake perform the essential functions of his job without incurring further injury. A rubber mat to stand on and a wheeled cart to transport tools were recommended to reduce fatigue and prevent injury to his supportive leg.

Ellie

Ellie lives with Bipolar Disorder and a Substance Use Disorder. When she applied to VR her expressed career goal was to become a college professor. Her disability causes her to have a limited tolerance for stress and she has poorly developed coping strategies. She developed an addiction to alcohol but has undergone rehabilitation and is one year sober.

Evaluation: Psychological testing was employed to: 1) identify Ellie's ability to succeed in post-secondary education, 2) assess her ability to benefit from psychotherapeutic services, and 3) identify strategies to help her succeed both academically and vocationally. This assessment revealed that Ellie is creative and bright, which suggests she is capable of succeeding in college. The assessment also revealed that Ellie is insightful and thus is capable of benefiting from therapy.

Career Guidance and Counseling: To help her build insight into the realities of working as a college professor, Ellie was encouraged to explore the essential functions of a college instructor position by interviewing people currently employed as language professors. Through this process, Ellie discovered that she was not prepared to endure the level of education required to work as a professor.

Through this same process, Ellie was able to clarify that she enjoys helping others, has a passion for foreign language, and loves to travel. Given this discovery, her VR counselor suggested Ellie consider teaching English as a Second Language as a career path. ESL teachers often work overseas. Ellie expressed enthusiasm for this idea. To ensure her understanding of the field, Ellie was encouraged to meet with an advisor in the ESL department at the University, which she did. After learning more about the essential functions of work as an ESL teacher, Ellie chose ESL Teacher as her vocational goal.

Another facet of Ellie's counseling included the development of a "survival plan," which she can use to help her cope with stress and avoid decompensation. The survival plan can be implemented both stateside and when she is abroad. Therapy, medication, Alcoholics Anonymous and having a sponsor are all components of the plan.

Training: Given the education requirements of an ESL instructor, VR funded the costs of tuition and books beyond what financial aid covered. VR also assisted with therapy costs.

Job Placement Assistance: Once she graduates, VR will provide structure and support via job placement assistance to help Ellie secure a job in her field.



