

Investing in America



2011–2012

*The Public Vocational
Rehabilitation (VR)
Program— Employing
the Talents of Qualified
Americans with Disabilities
in the Workplace during
Challenging Economic Times*

www.rehabnetwork.org



Investing in America

The Public Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program—
Employing the Talents of Qualified Americans with Disabilities
in the Workplace during Challenging Economic Times

Vital VR Services

Since its creation in 1920, the Public Vocational Rehabilitation Program has worked with public and private-sector employers to assist more than 18.2 million people with disabilities acquire, maintain and advance in gainful employment. Each year more than one million persons with disabilities are served by the Public VR Program. Approximately 93% of those served are individuals with significant disabilities.

In Federal FY 2010, 171,962 VR consumers entered employment in the competitive labor market and became wage earners. In many cases they left government supported programs to become tax paying citizens and contribute to America's economic recovery. Together they earned about \$3 billion in wages in their first year of work and paid close to \$1 billion in federal, state and local taxes. They will pay back the cost of their VR services in two to four years. A portion of VR consumers are Social Security beneficiaries with significant disabilities. According to the Social Security Administration, VR's assistance to these SSA recipients will result in a projected lifetime SSA recoupment rate of \$7.00 to every \$1.00 reimbursed to VR. These former SSA beneficiaries will generate \$828 million of savings to the Social Security Trust Fund and the federal treasury.

In a recent Hearing on the Employment of Individuals with Developmental Disabilities in the US Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pension, J Randolph Lewis, Senior Vice President of Supply Chain and Logistics for Walgreen Co. made the following statement in his testimony.

"Our employees with disabilities showed that they can be successful in highly competitive environments and triumph over biases every day. They are terrific employees and they meet and exceed the same performance requirements for all employees." He went on to say "In our commitment to employing people with disabilities, great performance was something we hoped for. We have gotten it. We have been rewarded with a safe, dependable and productive workforce. Along the way, we discovered another, more intangible but powerful benefit. That is, the impact our commitment to employing people with disabilities has had on our work environment and on each one of us. It has changed us for the better."

This is what Investing In America is all about – recognizing the talents and abilities of all of America's citizens and assuring that agencies like the Public VR Program whose primary purpose is to assist individuals with disabilities to acquire competitive employment, have the fiscal and human resources they need to get the job done.

With advances in technology and the shortage of qualified workers, many new mainstream work opportunities are becoming more available for persons with disabilities across all sectors of employment. With additional fiscal and human resources, the Public VR Program is well positioned to assist eligible individuals with disabilities to take full advantage of those opportunities.



David Gillespie, a molecular biologist in Utah, is one of the talented individuals who has benefitted from VR services. Now using a standing power chair after a spinal cord injury, he is able to continue to devote his expertise to important cancer research and support his family.

The NET–Business Partnerships

The Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) sponsors The NET (National Employment Team). The NET was designed with

NET works in collaboration with the Rehabilitation Services Administration, the Veteran's Administration–VR Employment Coordinators and the American Indian Rehabilitation programs to offer business customers access to the largest nationally coordinated talent pool of candidates with disabilities.

Through The NET, VR is taking a dual customer approach. The work with business allows VR staff to incorporate "real time" feedback from their employer partners into their career planning strategies with individual customers served by the program. Through The NET, this upfront planning and national business involvement also results in VR increasing their efficiency and effectiveness in meeting the employment needs of business with qualified candidates and support services.

The NET has partnerships with a number of major corporations and has recognized business customers such as Walgreens, Safeway, Convergys, Microsoft and Food Lion. The NET also partners with federal agencies such as the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the Department of Transportation (DOT), the National Institute of Health (NIH) and the Defense Commissary Agency (DeCA), to name a few. The CSAVR/NET has also partnered with WMHT, the Public Broadcasting affiliate in Albany, NY to produce a educational documentary called: "Get Off Your Knees: the John Robinson Story."

the input of 35 companies, as a collaborative approach to working with private and public sector businesses through a coordinated team of Business Relations Consultants that represent the 80 public VR agencies across the country, in the territories and the District of Columbia. The goal of The NET is to support business customers by leveraging the national resources of the public VR system to deliver qualified candidates and support services at the local level. The

www.rehabnetwork.org



A publication of the



*Council of State Administrators
of Vocational Rehabilitation*

www.rehabnetwork.org



Investing in America

The Public Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program—Employing the Talents of Qualified Americans with Disabilities in the Workplace during Challenging Economic Times



CSAVR and its Members Believe:

- Every individual with a disability should have the opportunity to work competitively,
- Public and private businesses are a dual customer of the public VR Program,
- Transition youth and veterans with disabilities are key VR customers,
- All programs and services for persons with disabilities must be physically and programmatically accessible,
- Individuals with significant and most significant disabilities need trained qualified rehabilitation professionals to assist them into employment, and
- Publicly funded programs need to be accountable and deliver a strong return on investment.

RECOMMENDATIONS	WHY
New dedicated line-item funding for transition youth services.	Transition from school to work for youth with disabilities needs more attention and resources than it has had until now to ensure youth have access to opportunities in the new labor market.
Maintain line-item funding for Supported Employment, Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers, and Projects with Industry as complementary programs to the Rehabilitation Act.	Public VR, due to high demand within the general population of people with disabilities, needs to focus more on service delivery to specialized populations such as recipients of Supported Employment and Projects with Industry, and Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers.
Amend The Rehabilitation Act to include language that acknowledges and supports business as a partner of Vocational Rehabilitation as well as the eligible individual with a disability.	Rehabilitation Act language does not address the obvious reality that VR and employers need to work together so people with disabilities can take their rightful place in the workforce.

[cont'd
on back]



CSAVR and its Members' Recommendations *—cont'd—*

RECOMMENDATIONS	WHY
<p>Retain the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) with the Department of Education (DOE) and maintain the status of the RSA Commissioner's position as a Presidential appointee in current law.</p>	<p>The close relationship between VR and special education is critical to ensure a successful transition for students with disabilities leaving the education system. These students represent the single largest source of potential consumers for VR services. The RSA Commissioner represents the most visible federal office for the disability community and therefore should remain a Presidential appointment.</p>
<p>Maintain the requirements of the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) in current law.</p>	<p>There is a need for qualified staff within Public VR who are trained to deal with the unique vocational rehabilitation and counseling needs of people with significant disabilities.</p>
<p>Amend The Rehabilitation Act to strengthen the authority of the State VR Director, to ensure that funds appropriated to serve individuals with significant disabilities are spent only for that purpose.</p>	<p>States sometimes have challenges ensuring the VR funds allocated to them for the purpose of assisting eligible people with disabilities to go to work are used only for that purpose. When these funds are so redirected, it is detrimental to Public VR's goal of assisting the maximum number of people with disabilities to go to work, including people with the most significant disabilities.</p>
<p>Secure a dedicated line-item to fund the infrastructure costs of One-Stop Centers.</p>	<p>States are having to use Public VR monies for supporting infrastructure costs of One-Stop Centers, thereby reducing resources available for case services. To alleviate that situation at the federal level there should be a line-item to fund One-Stop Centers and not scarce partner's resources.</p>
<p>Ensure the physical and programmatic accessibility of One-Stops, Job Training Programs, Educational Programs and other service programs.</p>	<p>Not all manpower training programs in each state are physical and programmatically accessible to people with disabilities.</p>
<p>Ensure that State VR Directors maintain seats on State and Local Workforce Boards.</p>	<p>Public VR needs to be an integral part of manpower training at the state and local level to ensure the employment needs of individuals with disabilities are adequately represented.</p>

Investing in America

The Public Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program—Employing the Talents of Qualified Americans with Disabilities in the Workplace during Challenging Economic Times



Q & A

What is the state vocational rehabilitation (VR) services program?

Under The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (The Act), as amended, states receive federal grants to operate a comprehensive VR program. This state-operated program is designed to assess, plan, develop and provide VR services to eligible individuals with disabilities, consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice. By providing services in this way, the VR program enables individuals with disabilities to prepare for and engage in gainful employment.

What does it mean to be an "individual with a disability"?

An "individual with a disability" means any individual:

- who has a physical or mental impairment which constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment for the individual; and
- who can benefit from VR services to achieve an employment outcome.

Who is eligible for VR services?

To be eligible for VR services, an individual must:

- be an "individual with a disability," as defined above; and
- require VR services to prepare for, secure, retain or regain employment.

Is anyone presumed eligible for VR services leading to employment?

Individuals who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits are presumed to be eligible for VR services leading to employment, unless they are too significantly disabled to benefit from VR services.

Does every eligible individual receive VR services?

No. The Act requires VR to serve individuals with the most significant disabilities first when there are not enough resources to serve everyone who is eligible for VR services. This means that individuals with the most significant disabilities are given a priority over those with less significant disabilities. This process is called an "order of selection."

How does an individual apply for VR services?

- An individual has the right to submit a written application.
- An individual will be considered to have "submitted an

application" when he/she "requests" VR services and provides sufficient information for VR to determine eligibility.

- VR should determine eligibility within 60 days of application.

How does an individual receive VR services?

- The VR agency assigns a VR counselor to each eligible individual.
- The counselor gathers as much information as possible about the individual's work history, education and training, abilities and interests, rehabilitation needs and possible career goals. In gathering the information, the counselor will first look to existing information, so it is important for an individual to bring copies of medical, educational and similar documentation.
- If existing information is not sufficient to determine whether the individual is eligible for VR services, then VR will provide assessment services to gather the needed information.
- Based on the information gathered in this assessment phase of the VR process, an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that identifies the individual's desired employment outcome is developed. The IPE also lists, among other things, the steps necessary to achieve the individual's employment outcome, the services needed to help the individual achieve that outcome and evaluation criteria used to determine progress toward the employment outcome. The VR agency may only provide those services listed on the IPE.
- The state VR counselor provides some services directly to the eligible individual and arranges for other services from providers in the community.

How does an individual develop an IPE?

- Once an individual is determined eligible to receive VR services, he or she must develop an IPE. The individual must be given the opportunity to make an informed choice in selecting, among other things, an employment outcome, needed VR services and providers of those VR services.
- The individual may develop the IPE: on his/her own, with the assistance of a qualified VR counselor or with the assistance of anyone else who is willing to help.
- The VR agency must provide the individual with information in writing, as well as in an appropriate mode of communication, explaining the assistance available to the individual when developing the IPE as well as the full range of components that must be included in the IPE.
- The IPE must be approved by the VR counselor and signed by both the individual and the VR counselor.

Investing in America

The Public Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program—Employing the Talents of Qualified Americans with Disabilities in the Workplace during Challenging Economic Times



Q & A— cont'd

What are the VR services an eligible individual may receive?

VR services are those services that an eligible individual may need in order to achieve his/her employment outcome.

These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- an assessment for determining eligibility and VR needs;
- vocational counseling, guidance and referral services;
- physical and mental restoration services;
- vocational and other training, including on-the-job training;
- maintenance for additional costs incurred while the individual is receiving certain VR services;
- transportation related to other VR services;
- interpreter services for individuals who are deaf;
- reader services for individuals who are blind;
- services to assist students with disabilities to transition from school to work;
- personal assistance services (including training in managing, supervising and directing personal assistance services) while an individual is receiving VR services;
- rehabilitation technology services and devices;
- supported employment services; and
- job placement services.

Does the eligible individual have to pay for VR services?

Based on the individual's available financial resources, the state VR agency may require an eligible individual to help pay for services. However, the following services are available to all eligible individuals, regardless of their financial resources, without charge:

- assessments to determine eligibility and VR needs;
- vocational counseling, guidance and referral services;
- and job search and placement services.

What are comparable services and benefits?

These are benefits or services that are:

- paid for, in whole or in part, by another federal, state or local public agency or employee benefits;
- available at the time the individual needs them; and
- comparable to the services that the individual would receive from the VR agency.

Merit-based awards and scholarships are not considered "comparable services and benefits." Before providing certain VR services, the counselor must determine whether another

source, such as medical insurance or Medicaid, etc., can pay for the service. However, the counselor is not required to look for a "comparable service or benefit" if it would delay:

- the individual's progress toward achieving an employment outcome;
- an immediate job placement; or
- the provision of services to an eligible individual who is at extreme medical risk.

What is the Client Assistance Program (CAP)?

CAP is available in each state to assist individuals in their relationships with the VR agency. If an applicant for or recipient of VR services is not satisfied with the services received or the decisions made by the VR counselor, CAP may be able to help resolve the dispute.

Do individuals have appeal rights with the VR program?

Yes. If an applicant for or recipient of the VR program is unhappy with a decision made by a VR employee, he/she may request a review of that decision. The law requires the VR agency to offer at least two methods of resolving a dispute: mediation or a formal hearing process. An individual may choose to use one or both of these processes to resolve the matter. In addition, the law provides the VR agencies with the flexibility to develop and implement informal review procedures to resolve disputes prior to the mediation or formal hearing process. These informal review procedures generally involve the applicant or individual, or, as appropriate, the applicant or individual's representative negotiating a resolution with the counselor or the counselor's supervisor.

Where can I get more information about the VR agency in my state?

The addresses and telephone numbers of the local VR agency offices generally are listed under "State Government" in the local telephone directory. You may also contact the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), the federal agency located in the U.S. Department of Education responsible for administering the VR program. Contact RSA via email at Carol.Dobak@ed.gov, via telephone at (202) 245-7325, via fax at (202) 245-7590, via the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339, via TDD/TTY at (202) 205-8919, or visit the following web site that contains much of this information at: www.jan.wvu.edu.

www.rehabnetwork.org

Investing in America

The Public Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program— Employing the Talents of Qualified Americans with Disabilities in the Workplace during Challenging Economic Times



Success Stories

2011–2012



David Gillespie: Keeping Talent Working

David's career as a molecular biologist at a prestigious cancer research center was interrupted for a period of time as he was rehabilitated following a spinal cord injury. However, he is now back at work full time, using a van with a lift for transportation and a standing power chair at the lab to complete research to complete research experiments. David reports that the Utah Vocational Rehabilitation program provided services vital to maintaining his employment which, in turn, helps him to take care of his family.

www.refinetwork.org

Nia Karmann: A Student's Story— It's All About Attitude



From the moment you meet Nia Karmann and see her smile, it is obvious that she has a positive attitude. Kyle Sterner, Special Populations Counselor at Central Community College (CCC) in Grand Island, describes Nia as, "smart, energetic, and an excellent self-advocate with a good uplifting attitude". These are the things that define Nia, not her disability.

Nia has spina bifida. This refers to a cleft spine, which is an incomplete closure in the spinal column. The most severe form of spina bifida causes muscle weakness or paralysis below the area of the spine where the incomplete closure occurs, loss of sensation below the cleft, and loss of control of bodily functions. For some individuals, fluid may build up and cause an accumulation of fluid in the brain (a condition known as hydrocephalus). Nia reports that her biggest challenge with spina bifida is her lack of mobility. Nia gives her family a lot of credit, noting the great support and love she receives from her mom, dad, and brother. The list of those who assisted her includes: Children's Hospital in Omaha, school nurses, Nebraska Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), and teachers and staff at Grand Island Northwest High School.

Not one to wait around for things to happen, Nia has already started on her career path with the support of Nebraska VR. In addition to working on her Business major and participating in many campus activities at CCC, she has recently started her own photography business. With an impressive portfolio of photos, an outgoing personality, and her "can-do" attitude, she is sure to be a success!



Success Stories –cont'd–

Joe Scagline: More Than a Job: AlliedBarton and MA-VR

Joe Scagline is the Regional Director of Human Resources for AlliedBarton Security Services, one of the largest contract security personnel companies in the United States. He has a personal and professional commitment to working with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) to hire qualified individuals who happen to have a disability. Joe simply states, “why wouldn’t companies do this, it just makes good business sense”. This attitude is demonstrated by the company’s 12 hires in the last nine months. But the most compelling story is what Joe and his team saw as the valuable skill set a United States Army Veteran with a disability could bring to the workplace.



JR always had a life mission to work in law enforcement and possessed a long held vision of protecting and serving the public. He served in the Armored Division of the United States Army, and was honorably discharged after suffering panic attacks and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) following an incident where he was trapped inside a damaged tank.

JR approached MRC in 2008 for assistance with his job search. JR was referred to AlliedBarton in September of 2010 and started an on-the-job training program in November 2010. With the assistance of the MRC Team, JR started as a part-time security guard. Today, JR has been promoted and is working full time as a shift supervisor.

It is clear that the MRC on-the-job training model for business outreach and employer development is creating careers and saving jobs. A most deserving veteran and 11 other qualified individuals with disabilities are gainfully employed by AlliedBarton as a result of this productive partnership.

Sharonda Johnson-Wilkes: A Beautiful Discovery

Sharonda Johnson-Wilkes’ successful transition from a Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiary to successful Federal Government Employee began in the spring of 2010. Sharonda, who has muscular dystrophy and uses a wheelchair, had been working with Maryland’s Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) to locate employment when she was introduced to a pilot internship program between the Financial Management Service (FMS), U.S. Department of Treasury, and DORS.



The DORS Business Specialist assisted Sharonda in obtaining an intern position in FMS’ Equal Opportunity and Organizational Enhancement Division (EOOE). Sharonda’s performance was impressive and EOOE expressed interest in offering her a permanent position. During this time other employment options were explored including the Schedule A Hiring Authority which eventually resulted in Sharonda’s full time job placement as an Office Automation Assistant in the EOOE Division on February 14, 2011. Sharonda and EOOE are thrilled with the outcome and FMS continues to work closely with DORS to develop other internship opportunities. In addition to transitioning to the world of work, Sharonda has also been busy pursuing other new titles; last fall she participated in the Ms. Wheelchair MD 2011 contest and was crowned Ms. Wheelchair Maryland on October 30, 2010.