

# Vocational Rehabilitation

## *Helping People With Disabilities Define Career Goals, Find Employment*

by Bill Dupes

Although many are still willing and eager to work, experienced workers are aging and retiring faster than they can be replaced. In fact, according to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, American businesses could face a multimillion worker shortage by 2010.



As a result of these shortages, businesses may eventually have to turn to alternative labor pools, such as the growing population of aging baby boomers and people with disabilities, to fill many of these positions.

Deciding on a career is not always easy, however, for people of any age or ability, and these individuals might want to explore the education and employment options that might be available to them. Moreover, although the chance to get early positive work experience can be a critical part of career success, the chance to learn about education and employment opportunities and to get experience is rarely available to young people

with disabilities.

This may be where Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) can help.

### **What Is VR?**

Vocational Rehabilitation is the national program for assisting eligible people with disabilities to define a meaningful career goal and become employed. Each state capital has a central VR agency and satellite offices throughout the state that can be found in the telephone directory under the STATE listing for Rehabilitative Services or Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

## Who May Apply?

VR is an eligibility program, not an entitlement program. Decisions about eligibility and the services you may need are made on an individual basis. You may apply for the program if:

- You are legally eligible to work in the United States.
- You have a physical, mental or emotional disability.
- The disability keeps you from finding or keeping a job.
- You are willing and able to work.

## How Does The Program Work?

VR accomplishes its mission through Vocational Counseling and Guidance, VR Services, Training and Education, and Job Placement.

### 1. Vocational Counseling and Guidance.

A counselor will work individually with you to provide support and assistance to reach your goal. The services you receive will depend on what you and your counselor agree is needed to help you become employed. This service helps you better understand your potential, set realistic job goals, change your job goal when needed, and learn good work habits. The information assessment process may include:

- Information about your disability, education, and social or family situation
- An evaluation of your knowledge, skills, abilities and interests
- An assessment of your work history, work habits, and work tolerances
- An evaluation of your assistive technology needs to determine necessary workplace accommodations.

**2. VR Services.** VR services are broadly defined as any goods or services needed to help you find employment. Following a diagnostic evaluation, you may receive one or more of the following services.

- **Assessment Services** identify your strengths and limitations through medical, psychiatric, social and psychological evaluation.
- **Vocational Assessment** identifies your interests, readiness for work, skills, and local job opportunities.

- **Counseling and Guidance** establishes an ongoing relationship between you and the counselor as you explore the evaluation results and develop a realistic work plan.

- **Restoration** increases your work potential through medical treatments.

- **Job Preparation** helps you develop work skills through volunteer experience, on-the-job training, vocational education or classroom training.

- **Support Services** may include transportation assistance, buying tools or equipment, or support for independent living.

- **Job Placement** assists in developing work opportunities and finding a job suited to your interests and abilities.

- **Independent Living Services** provide evaluations and services that can help you deal with daily living issues that can affect your employment goals. Examples include accessing community resources, self-advocacy, money management, and personal organization skills.

- **Assistive Technology Services** can help in the evaluation, selection, and acquisition of a device or equipment to improve your work potential.

**3. Training and Education.** A number of training options are available, depending on your abilities and goals.

- **On-the-Job Training**

- **Self-Employment** offers unmatched flexibility to accommodate a disabling condition. Supporting services include:

- Feasibility studies/market research
- Advice from business and marketing consultants
- Assistance in acquiring start-up funds or buying equipment.

- **Supported Employment**, in more severe cases, may be available to you and/or your employer to provide intensive support in accessing and performing the job, both on and off the job site.

- **Short-Term Vocational Training** is designed for students who wish to enter the job market quickly. The curriculum may require anywhere from a few hours to two years.

- **College Education.** VR agencies can provide a variety of assistance depending on your financial needs. First, however, you must apply for financial aid from the college you plan to attend. Any resulting financial aid award must be used toward the cost of your education before VR can pay any school-related costs.

**4. Job Placement.** Though the VR program helps individuals become job-ready, it is not an employment agency. When you are ready, you will need to look for a job just like people without disabilities. However, VR will help you in your search. For example, VR will help you find job leads, fill out applications, write a resume, or practice for and set up job interviews. In addition, VR can help you deal with disability issues at work, such as:

- Learning what to say about your disability to interviewers, your employer, or co-workers
- Negotiating with an employer for any changes to your job duties, worksite modifications, or devices needed due to your disability.



## EMPLOYMENT RESOURCES

### Student Transition Programs

Transition programs provide support and guidance to students with disabilities as they move from high school to the workplace. These programs can help students identify career interests and learn about the skills and training needed to prepare for careers in those fields.

#### HEATH Resource Center

800/544-3284

[www.heath.gwu.edu](http://www.heath.gwu.edu)

#### National Center on Secondary Education and Transition

[www.ncset.org](http://www.ncset.org)

#### National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities

##### National Directory

[www.nichcy.org/pubs/outprint/nd22.pdf](http://www.nichcy.org/pubs/outprint/nd22.pdf)

##### Resources for Adults with Disabilities

[www.nichcy.org/pubs/transum/adult.pdf](http://www.nichcy.org/pubs/transum/adult.pdf)

#### National Transition Network

[ici2.umn.edu/ntn](http://ici2.umn.edu/ntn)

### Seniors

Some employment services are designed to increase older workers' employment opportunities in the general labor market and in community service. Income-eligible individuals 55 and older are recruited, trained and referred to job openings with local employers with the ultimate goal to place them in nonsubsidized employment.

#### Administration on Aging

[www.aoa.gov](http://www.aoa.gov)

#### Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP)

[www.doleta.gov/seniors/HTML\\_Docs/Docs/AboutSCSEP.cfm](http://www.doleta.gov/seniors/HTML_Docs/Docs/AboutSCSEP.cfm)

#### AARP

[www.aarp.org/money/careers](http://www.aarp.org/money/careers)

#### Experience Works

[www.experienceworks.org](http://www.experienceworks.org)

#### The National Caucus and Center on Black Aged, Inc.

[www.ncba-aged.org/#](http://www.ncba-aged.org/#)

#### Senior Service America

[www.seniorserviceamerica.org](http://www.seniorserviceamerica.org)

#### Cool Works

[www.coolworks.com/older-bolder](http://www.coolworks.com/older-bolder)

### Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) offers income, medical, educational and VR services to qualified veterans.

#### Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

[www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)

#### Center for Veterans Enterprise

[www.vetbiz.gov](http://www.vetbiz.gov)

### Disability Employment

#### In Home Products: Employment and Education Resources

[www.inhomeproducts.com/Employment.html](http://www.inhomeproducts.com/Employment.html)

#### Just One Break

[www.justonebreak.com](http://www.justonebreak.com)

#### Job Accommodation Network

[www.jan.wvu.edu/links/employ.htm#](http://www.jan.wvu.edu/links/employ.htm#)

#### WORKSUPPORT.COM

[www.worksupport.com](http://www.worksupport.com)

#### Vocational Rehabilitation State Offices

[janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/sbses/VOCREHAB.HTM](http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/sbses/VOCREHAB.HTM)

#### Federal Employment of People with Disabilities

[www.opm.gov/disability](http://www.opm.gov/disability)

#### America's Career InfoNet

[www.acinet.org/acinet](http://www.acinet.org/acinet)

#### America's Job Bank

[www.ajb.org](http://www.ajb.org)

#### CareerOneStop

[www.careeronestop.org](http://www.careeronestop.org)

#### Job-Hunt.Org

[www.job-hunt.org](http://www.job-hunt.org)

#### JobAccess

[www.jobaccess.org](http://www.jobaccess.org)

## STUDENT AID RESOURCES



#### American Association of People with Disabilities

[www.aapd.com/links/linkscholarshipawards.php](http://www.aapd.com/links/linkscholarshipawards.php)

#### FastWeb

[www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)

#### FinAid

[www.finaid.org/otheraid/disabled.phtml](http://www.finaid.org/otheraid/disabled.phtml)

#### Financial Aid for Students With Disabilities

[www.parentsinc.org/finaid/finaid.html](http://www.parentsinc.org/finaid/finaid.html)

#### Higher Education and Adult Training for People with Handicaps

800/544-3284

[www.heath.gwu.edu](http://www.heath.gwu.edu)

#### International Center for Disability Resources on the Internet

919/349-6661

[www.icdri.org/Financial%20Aid/finaid.htm](http://www.icdri.org/Financial%20Aid/finaid.htm)

#### Stepping Back Into Life, Inc.

[www.LOIGNON.org](http://www.LOIGNON.org)