

CRP BRIEF



**Your Source for
Issues and Trends in
Community Rehabilitation**

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The State VR / CRP Partnership

Welcome

Welcome to the first CRP Brief. The VR/CRP partnership has been selected as the first topic because we believe that this collaboration is a necessary component to the successful employment of people with disabilities. We are honored to have RSA Commissioner Joanne Wilson introduce this topic. Commissioner Wilson is founder of the Louisiana Center for the Blind and has served as President of the National Federation for the Blind in Louisiana since 1982. She was appointed Rehabilitation Services Administration Commissioner by President George W. Bush in June 2001.

Foreword by

JOANNE WILSON, RSA COMMISSIONER

I am especially pleased to contribute to this, the first edition of the “CRP Brief.” The state-federal program of vocational rehabilitation depends heavily on the work you do to deliver the services needed to help our customers succeed. As many of you know, prior to my appointment as the Commissioner I was the Director of the Louisiana Center for the Blind. Our job, like yours, was to get people with disabilities ready for employment. Our center worked with blind and visually impaired persons. We faced many challenges. Perhaps the biggest challenge was making people believe in themselves. It is said that you can’t reach your dream until you have one. Our job was to help our customers see the possibilities, the dreams, and then help them reach them.

When I was invited to write this foreword, I was asked to address my views on the roles of CRPs in the VR system. I believe that top among your many roles is helping people believe in themselves and reach their dreams. I believe to do this, we must immerse customers in a rich environment, one that fosters positive attitudes, employs positive role models and builds confidence and empowerment skills. How do you do

this? Sometimes simple actions are the most powerful. For example:

- ▶ Involving customers in your business: gathering and using the input and ideas from customers – current and former customers – is fundamental to developing programs that foster growth, confidence and empowerment.
- ▶ Getting customers connected with other people with disabilities: Other people with disabilities can serve as positive role models, show what is possible, develop useful and practical resources, establish peer support and develop self help skills.
- ▶ Involving staff in consumer groups: Better understanding, insight and knowledge lead to staff belief in customer potential, which leads to better services.

While such actions may be simple, taking them requires a determined commitment.

CRPs are in the perfect position to make this commitment. Doing so will make a major difference in the lives of our customers. If CRPs help develop positive attitudes and confidence in our customers, it will lead to even higher quality employment outcomes and a better quality of life. I look forward to working with you in this effort.

HIGHLIGHTS

Purpose

The state/federal **vocational rehabilitation** (VR) system is charged with improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities. **Collaboration** is an important element of this success – collaboration with customers with disabilities, other state agencies, employers, and **community rehabilitation programs** (CRPs). The purpose of this brief is to describe the VR/CRP partnership and the federal legislation that state VR programs operate under in support of this mission.

History

As far back as the 1920's, the government has assisted individuals with disabilities with employment. The federal agency designated to carry out Congress' legislative intent is the **Rehabilitation Services Administration** (RSA). RSA is responsible for providing the oversight and funding of these legislative mandates at the state level. In turn, each state has a designated state unit, or state VR program. In some states there are two state VR agencies – one general agency and one specifically serving the blind. Each state agency assists consumers to develop an **individualized plan for employment**, which often results in a referral to a CRP for services.

Training for CRPs

Formalized contracts between state VR and CRPs describe the services to be performed and the fees for those services. As a result, it is the CRPs who often have the most intensive and ongoing contact with persons with disabilities as they move toward employment. Recognizing the **vital role** CRPs play, RSA has provided grants to help CRP personnel maintain high levels of skills and knowledge in employment services. There is a **CRP-RCEP** (Regional Continuing Education Program) in each of the 10 federal regions. Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas comprise Region VI, and the University of North Texas was awarded the CRP-RCEP for this region.

Terminology

The state VR system operates under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and its subsequent amendments. The term **community rehabilitation program** was first introduced in the Rehabilitation

Act Amendments of 1992, reflecting an increasing emphasis on community and integrated employment. The term **community rehabilitation program** means a program that directly provides or facilitates vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities. These programs maximize employment opportunities for persons with disabilities. The federal government allows a multitude of services including medical services, assistive technology, employment, speech pathology, and personal assistant services. For the purposes of this brief, we will focus on CRPs that provide employment services.

Partnerships

The law specifically addresses CRPs as **partners** because of the important role these organizations play in assisting people with disabilities to find employment. In addition to purchasing needed medical services and equipment, many VR agencies contract with CRPs to provide job development, job placement, supported employment, and other employment services. Because most VR counselors have well over 100 active cases on their caseload, they must contract with CRPs for much of the labor intensive services needed by their consumers - such as job analysis, job accommodations, and job placement. CRPs are important partners in providing these services, particularly for those consumers with the **most significant disabilities**.

The Workforce Investment Act further emphasized the need for all of us to work together as we assist people in finding meaningful employment. In addition to VR, some of the other partners listed in this act are welfare to work, services for youth, and the Veterans Administration. Local one-stop centers are charged with working with these partners to meet the needs of job seekers and employers. Clearly, partnerships are a necessary component in the employment arena.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CONSUMERS

The federal VR legislation assumes that all people with disabilities can work and are eligible for services. "Individuals with disabilities, including individuals with the most significant disabilities, are generally presumed to be capable of engaging in gainful employment and the provision of individual-

ized vocational rehabilitation services can improve their ability to become gainfully employed [Sec.100(a)(3)(A)].” The good news for consumers is that this means that those individuals with the most severe disabilities can no longer be excluded from services. **Everyone who wants to work should have the opportunity to find meaningful employment.**

There is a greater emphasis on **consumer choice**. The Act stresses the fact that people with disabilities must be “active and full partners in the vocational rehabilitation process, making meaningful and **informed choices**”. Consumers are part of this partnership. People with disabilities have more options in choosing their vocational goals and in choosing what agencies they utilize to provide services. The Workforce Investment Act provides opportunities for individuals with disabilities to receive **generic** employment services through their local onestop centers.

The Act also specifies, “individuals with disabilities must be provided the opportunities to obtain gainful employment in **integrated settings**.” The increased importance of jobs that allow people with disabilities an opportunity to work in their community, alongside non-disabled peers, has the potential to open more doors for good jobs.

RELEVANCE TO CRPS

Skilled staff

More than ever, CRPs will need to be positioned to serve individuals with the **most significant disabilities**. They will need staff skilled in making good job matches, assessing job accommodation needs, and utilizing assistive technology to assist their customers in becoming gainfully employed.

Empowered consumers

The focus on **informed choice** means that consumers will have more of a say in what agencies they utilize to provide these services. CRPs will need to demonstrate that the consumer has been involved in making their own choices. This will require skills in person-centered planning, consumer assessment, development of work trial experiences, and individualized planning.

Focused marketing

Helping their consumers to realize their dreams

through these somewhat, non-traditional means will be a valuable service CRPs can provide. The good news for CRPs is that they will have more of an opportunity to **market** their services to consumers. Those with the best outcomes will most likely receive the most referrals.

RSA regulations

Effective October 1, 2001, RSA Regulations were amended by revising the scope of employment outcomes under the VR program. The regulations redefined **employment outcome** to mean outcomes in which an individual with a disability works in an integrated setting. This highlights the need for CRPs to assist consumers in finding jobs in the community. If a consumer chooses extended employment, VR can still refer them to a CRP for these services, but they can no longer count as an employment outcome. This will most likely result in more referrals for job placement and supported employment and a decrease in referrals for work adjustment services and sheltered employment.

The challenge

Most CRPs already have extensive **relationships with employers** and can capitalize on these by assisting people with disabilities to get community, integrated jobs. They will need employees who can interface effectively with employers and other agencies providing employment services, in order to provide the best jobs possible for their customers.

SUMMARY

State VR agencies have partnered with CRPs to assist people with disabilities in getting employed for more than fifty years.

This partnership has been strengthened by some of legislative mandates in recent years. State VR counselors are well positioned to provide the counseling and guidance needed to assist people with disabilities in making an informed choice. This choice may require a referral to a CRP to assist them in meeting their vocational goals. Most CRPs have an established relationship with their local VR office and together they can partner with the individual with a disability to assist them in fulfilling their vocational dream.

Meeting the continuing education needs of community rehabilitation providers

References

Federal Register: January 22, 2001 (Volume 66, Number 14) [Rules and Regulations] [Page 7249-7258]

Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Public Law 93-112.
Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992. Public Law 102-569.

Workforce Investment Act of 1998. Public Law 105-220.

Websites

Rehabilitation Services Administration:
[http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/RSA/Rehabilitation Act of 1973](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/RSA/Rehabilitation%20Act%20of%201973)

<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/RSA/Policy/Legislation/index.html>

RSA Regulations on extended employment:
<http://www.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/finrule/2001-1/012201a.html>

Workforce Investment Act:
<http://usworkforce.org/asp/act.asp>

LOOK FOR THESE TOPICS IN FUTURE ISSUES OF THE CRP BRIEF:

- ▶ ***TTW, Ticket to Work, TWWIA:** What kind of alphabet soup is this?*
- ▶ ***Assistive Technology:** How can it help consumers and employers?*
- ▶ ***Americans with Disabilities Act:** Have recent court decisions limited this legislation?*
- ▶ ***Transition School-to-Work:** Putting it all together!*

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