Region II


State VR Agencies:

New Jersey
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services
Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

New York
Vocational and Educational Services For Individuals with Disabilities
Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped

Puerto Rico
Vocational Rehabilitation Administration

Prepared by
RRCEP II
http://www.rcep2.buffalo.edu/
Dear Colleagues,

It is with pleasure that we provide you with a compilation of reports on the follow-up activities to the 2002 National Employment Conference that were conducted by State VR agencies in Region II. We hope that by sharing these innovative practices, training programs and techniques, other State Vocational Rehabilitation Programs and Rehabilitation Practitioners will be able to capitalize on the knowledge that has been acquired on increasing the employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and express our appreciation for the support of the State VR Agency Directors and their staffs in completing this activity. We encourage each of you to continue the promising employment–related activities on which you reported and consider adopting as you deem appropriate, successful strategies identified by the other agencies.

Finally, we would like to thank Dr. David Burganowski and the staff of the Region II Regional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program for their assistance in producing this publication.

Should you have questions about any of the attached reports, please contact the respective State agency responsible for submitting the report or Mr. Richard Anderson, Regional Employment Specialist for Region II on (212/637-6445; Richard.Anderson@ed.gov). Also, please contact Mr. Anderson if we can be of further assistance.

Thank you again for your continued commitment to expanding employment opportunities for participants in the State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program.

Sincerely,

Allen Kropp       Jerry Iodice
Regional Commissioner       Assistant Regional Commissioner
New Jersey
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Inside This Section:
- Partnering for Success
- HireAbility
- Workability
- New Jersey Department of Labor
- Project Access - Workforce Investment Grant
- Centers for Independent Living
SUMMARY OF NJDVRS EMPLOYMENT ACTIVITIES

Key Points

• Partnering for Success

  1. NJ DVRS has been active in the process of including Private Sector Employers into our activities and presentation to heighten awareness of individuals with disabilities as a viable job candidate pool.

  2. The agency has also highlighted its ability to be of assistance to employers on matters of disability, ADA compliance and reasonable accommodation. This activity will not only be a core part of what DVRS does on a routine basis but it will be a feature of the One-Stop Business Services Center which will be a part of each NJ One-Stop

• HireAbility – Southern New Jersey.

  1. DVRS funds and works closely with this division of the Delaware Valley Project with Industry to educate employers and facilitate placement in the southern counties.

• Workability – Statewide Initiative

  1. To bring employers together with providers understand the specific and mutual needs. This is an effort of the New Jersey Division of Disability Services as a part of their Infrastructure Grant activity of which DVRS is a key partner. This year’s initiative has designated October to be the month in which three regional forums will be held featuring employers round-table discussions on Disability Awareness, Tax Incentives, Assistive Technology and preparation.

• New Jersey Department of Labor – Statewide

  1. As a part of NJDOL the agency partners with other divisions to provide information and cross training on disability issues and the benefits of hiring qualified applicants for New Jersey’s Workforce. As a part of this initiative the agency has representation on The Employer Services Council and meets regularly with The Business Services Representatives who promote economic development and customized training to the state’s business community.

• Project Access – Workforce Investment Grant

  1. Under the auspices of this DOL Grant the agency will take the lead to ensure that the state’s One-Stop Centers and programs will be accessible
to people with disabilities. The activities included under this funding deal with several issues identified at The National Employment Conference.

2. Transitioning Youth – One of the county based initiatives of the grant will be to center on youth with disabilities as they make their way from the school environment to post school activities such as training, advanced education, supported employment and other adult services.

3. Assistive Technology and Employment – There will be funds expended on adapting the One-Stops to the needs of a variety of individuals to ensure reasonable accommodation goals will be met. Information will be shared among and throughout the service delivery system to be sure that this becomes the accepted model rather than the exception.

• **Centers for Independent Living**

In the conference synopsis it was noted that the Centers for Independent Living were not appropriately recognized as an employment source and full partner in the VR process particularly where the students in transition were concerned. The following plans have been activated to improve and enhance the process:

1. Expanded CIL involvement with DVRS Local Office Staffs – Quarterly contact will be facilitated by the Program Specialist responsible for each CIL.

2. In an arrangement with the NJ Department of Education-Office of Special Education Programs the agency is guiding the process where each of the 12 CILs will be eligible to receive a grant that will allow an expansion of services to youth in transition by the CIL. Innovative strategies and programs will be encouraged over a 36 month period as part of the OSERS State Improvement Grant.

• **Statewide Symposium on Persons with Disabilities and Work**

1. In conjunction with The John J Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University DVRS will be a co-sponsor and key partner in this gathering scheduled for October 10, 2003. It is hoped that senior staff, policy makers, legislators and corporate leaders will gather to determine the direction that New Jersey will be taking in the next five years and to make recommendations on the state of employment of people with disabilities.
New Jersey
Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired

Inside This Section:
- Partnering for Success
- Jump-Starting Employment
- Understanding the Uses of Research and Technologies
- Hiring and Retention in the Public Sector
- Handing Over the Keys
SUMMARY OF NJCBVI EMPLOYMENT ACTIVITIES

Key Points

- **Partnering for Success: Leveraging Resources to Strengthen Private Sector Employer Relations**

  1. CBVI participated in an on-line Career Fair, sponsored by monster.com. Resumes were forwarded by CBVI staff or consumers. Consumers had the opportunity to chat on-line with perspective employers about jobs in their organizations. Some of the employers who participated were Verizon, Johnson & Johnson, Hewlett Packard, AT & T, and Comcast.

  2. The Commission has been actively promoting NFB’s Jobline as a resource to its consumers. Utilization has increased 300% during the last 4 months. Jobline is a call-in system, which is linked to America’s Job Bank. It is designed as an employment resource for individuals who do not have access to a computer and/or prefer to use the telephone for their respective searches. The information is updated every 24 hours, it has personal job search capacity, and an automated application/resume service.

  3. The Commission is a member of the Disability sub-committee for the State Employment and Training Commission. The purpose of the sub-committee is to develop recommendations to address disability issues, such as lack of access, at the One-Stop Centers. The sub committee is also involved with the training of front line staff at the One-Stops.

- **Jump-Starting Employment: VR and the Transition of Students from School to Work**

  1. CBVI conducts a two-week summer program at the Joseph Kohn Rehabilitation Center for ninth grade transition students. The focus of the two-week experience, in addition to skill assessment and training, is to provide career exploration. The students are exposed to various careers in industries such as the food and hospitality field, and other areas of interest.

  2. A Career Day is conducted at Drew University for the 10th and 11th graders, who attend the college/vocational programs. Information as to what careers the students are interested in is gathered prior to setting up the program. Tables are set up and the students have the opportunity to interact with successful persons who are blind and learn about various careers and the skills and knowledge needed to be employed in those areas of work.
3. The CBVI has developed a “Bridge” program for transition student 14 to 18 years of age. It will be conducted on Saturdays at the Joseph Kohn Rehabilitation Center. The purpose of this program is to provide these students with the necessary skills to participate in their present school setting and to prepare them to successfully enter into training or employment after the completion of secondary school.

4. The Commission continues to promote the utilization of Career Connect through AFB as a mechanism to provide career information to students with disabilities,

- **Understanding the Uses of Research and Technologies: Cutting-Edge Strategies for Placement and Retention**

  1. The Commission has developed and expanded a loaner program at the New Jersey Library for the Blind and Print Handicapped. This program has been able to provide the technological equipment consumers, as they enter into employment and training program.

- **Hiring and Retention in the Public Sector: Innovative Programs at the Federal, State and Local Levels**

  1. Elijah’s Promise- Culinary Training Program. The Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired has developed a relationship with a culinary training program in New Brunswick. Clients at this program are able to receive residential services at the Joseph Kohn Rehabilitation Center. The 610-hour, 17-week culinary program provides professional food service instruction by a certified Instructor/Chef. Permanent competitive placement occurs subsequent to the successful completion of a two-week internship experience. The participants are provided with an array of auxiliary services consisting of an in-house staff: Social Worker, Basic Skills Instructor, Addictions Counselor, and Placement Coordinator. Placement rates are between 95 and 100%.

  2. Bridge Program. The Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired has developed and implemented a Bridge training Program. The purpose of the program is to provide small-class instruction to CBVI consumers interested in either pursuing college, vocational, or community-based training or to those who aspire to competitive employment positions, which require knowledge and use of computer programs in order to successfully perform essential job functions. Instruction is taught in the areas of Microsoft Office applications, such as Word, Excel, Internet, and Email. The curriculum has been purchased by DeWitt, Inc. and modified as
needed. Classes are held at the JKRC for four weeks, four days per week. Students are provided with homework assignments in order to gauge their progression. Residential students have the added advantage of continuing practicing their skills after class and in the evenings, using JKRC computers.

3. Hospitality Program. The Commission for the Blind & Visually Impaired is developing a Hospitality Program in cooperation with Monmouth County Vocational Rehabilitation Services. In the hospitality program, students will have the opportunity to experience all phases of food service. Students can be trained for positions in food preparation, management, as well as counter service. Training will be for 12 weeks, followed by a 2-week internship period.

• **Handing Over the Keys: Strategies to Make Consumer-Driven Service Provision a Reality**

  1. Commission VR staff participated in Choice Training. This was provided by Dr. Fred Schroeder, the former Commissioner of RSA. The purpose of the training was to teach VR staff the importance and need to make the consumer the focal point of the service delivery system.

  2. A presentation was made to the Drew transition students by an blind professional who had gone through the transition process with the CBVI. The focus of the presentation and ensuing dialogue with the students was on the need for them to become their own self advocates and to self direct their own vocational planning.
New York
Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities

Inside This Section:
- Training for VRCs on Transition
- Training for Supervisors
- VESID Employment Outcome Policy
- Mental Health Technical Assistance Brief
SUMMARY OF NY VESID EMPLOYMENT ACTIVITIES

Key Points

- **Training for VRCs on Transition**  NEC Track: Jump-Starting Employment: VR and the Transition of Students from School to Work

  1. This comprehensive training package was developed for counselors whose case loads are focused on the population of students with disabilities making the transition from secondary school to work, postsecondary education or adult services. The training focuses on the details of working with this population as well as on the process of managing a case load to enhance opportunities for success.

- **Training for Supervisors**  NEC Track: Handing over the Keys: Strategies to Make Consumer Driven Service Provision a Reality

  1. This is another comprehensive training package which is designed to support supervisors in their work with counselors. It can be used as a manual for the entire VR process and provides not only technical information on coding and use of VESID’s policies, procedures and technology, but also stresses issues such as assuring consumer choice and participation in services.

- **VESID Employment Outcome Policy**  NEC Track: Handing over the Keys: Strategies to Make Consumer Driven Service Provision a Reality

  1. An integral part of VESID’s Employment Outcome Policy is consumer choice and participation in services as well as satisfaction with the outcome. VESID’s Training Unit trained staff on the new policy as part of the regular roll out.

- **Mental Health Technical Assistance Brief**  NEC Tracks: Understanding the Uses of Research and Technologies: Cutting Edge Strategies for Placement and Retention and Hiring and Retention in the Public Sector: Innovative Programs at the Federal, State and Local Levels

  1. This comprehensive package provides a broad range of information on aspects of mental health disorders and their management as well as information on practical job accommodations and problem solving mechanisms intended to assist counselors in obtaining and maintaining quality employment outcomes for consumers with mental health disabilities. Additionally, information is provided on the resources of our partner agencies who also work with this population and with whom it is essential that VESID coordinate.
New York
Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped

Inside This Section:
- Partnering for Success
- Jump-Starting Employment
- Understanding the Uses of Research and Technologies
- Hiring and Retention in the Public Sector
- Handing Over the Keys
SUMMARY OF NY CBVH EMPLOYMENT ACTIVITIES

Key Points

• Partnering for Success: Leveraging Resources to Strengthen Private Sector Employer Relations

1. The ADA and Employer Issues – Conducted by Amy Welch from Cornell University, this training program focused on reasonable accommodations and employer responsibilities during the hiring process.

2. Job Development – A panel discussion that focused on the emerging role of the Job Developer in the placement process. Two job developers and one traditional placement specialist presented.

• Jumpstarting Employment: VR and the Transition of Students from School to Work

1. NYS Youth Bureau Conference – The Office of Children and Family Services (formerly the Division for Youth) sponsored this conference. It featured a series of workshops pertaining to youth development and community resources.

2. Youth Academy 2003 – This program was sponsored by the New York State Department of Labor, the United States Department of Labor and the New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals, Inc. The program focused on Youth Council issues, specifically focusing on strategies for keeping youth involved in programs. The workshops included training on teaching work habits to youth, encouraging employers to hire youth, leveraging resources for Youth Councils and youth programs, and job search activities for youth.

3. Utica Transition Academy – A transition conference whose attendees represented State VR agencies, community based organizations, school districts and parents. Its purpose was to collaboratively plan to advance successful transition from school to adult life.

4. Career Zone – A presentation to all CBVH counseling staff regarding this internet-based employment assessment protocol used for young adults. The Career Zone is under the auspices of the New York State Department of Labor.

• Understanding the Uses of Research and Technologies: Cutting-Edge Strategies for Placement and Retention
1. **Adaptive Technology Training** - All CBVH staff receives training twice per year at one of nine Adaptive Technology Centers for the Blind in New York State. CBVH management and local office priorities establish topics. Demonstrations and hands-on opportunities were provided on ZoomText 7.11/SuperNova5.02, the Penny Giles Joystick and Intelikeys Keyboard, Tiger Embosser, PDF Conversions and much more.

- **Hiring and Retention in the Public Sector: Innovative Programs at the Federal, State and Local Levels**
  
  1. See **Partnering for Success**.

- **Handing over the Keys: Strategies to Make Consumer-Driven Service Provision a Reality**
  
Puerto Rico

Vocational Rehabilitation Administration

Inside This Section:
- Presentations by participants
- FUTOROS, Inc.
- Orientations in the implementation of the “Comprehensive Educational Services for Person with Disabilities”
- Committees established
SUMMARY OF PR VRA EMPLOYMENT ACTIVITIES

Key Points

- Presentations by the participants on the national conference on the topics of said conference to the staff of the Arecibo, Humacao, San Juan and Ponce districts; to the staff of the Center of Training and Transition to Employment for the Deaf; and to other staff from the VRA’s central level. The topics included transition, use and abuse of alcohol and drugs by consumers, teamwork, and collaboration among public/private agencies.

- Sharing and distribution of written material on transition to transition coordinators of the regions and other VRA’s central level personnel.

- Participation with FUTUROS, Inc. in numerous efforts related to individuals with disabilities. As a non-profit organization created in 1983, FUTUROS has maintained a strategic alliance of representatives from industry, commerce, banking, education and government working together with the VRA, to promote the employment of qualified individuals with disabilities, develop competitive/gainful employment outcomes, and train employers in areas relevant to the rehabilitation field. Therefore, and in accordance with the topics of the national conference, the VRA has collaborated with FUTUROS, to:

  1. Carry out the “Seventeenth Annual Conference on the Needs of Persons with Disabilities.” This activity took place in March of 2003, with an attendance of approximately 200 participants from the public/private sectors and business community. The most important themes of this year’s conference were the significance of developing strategic working alliances, and reasonable accommodations: obligation or right.

  2. Incorporate in FUTUROS’ web page a talent bank with resumes of job-ready consumers with disabilities. It also includes statements from consumers and employers on their respective experiences related to employment. This information is helpful to employers and other interested parties.

- Coordination and offering of orientations on the management of transition referrals, importance of teamwork, and responsibilities of the agencies in the implementation of the “Comprehensive Educational Services for Persons with Disabilities,” better known as State Law No. 51 of 1996, as amended. These orientations were provided in the 10 regions serviced by the VRA, during the period from December of 2002 – April of 2003. Two hundred and twenty-four (224) persons participated in these activities, including VR counselors, supervisors, counselor’s assistants and office personnel.
Continuation with our participation in the implementation of the work plan of services for those special communities characterized by privation, isolation and lack of resources, as determined by the Governor’s Office and the Department of Labor. The purpose of said work plan is to ensure the coordination and delivery of services, from the various agencies, through the One-Stop Center and/or any other appropriate facility. Two committees have been established to visit special communities and low-income residential projects, and the VRA is participating in both, in order to guarantee the proper orientation and referral to our services. The following data supports this:

1. **Special Communities:**

   Period: September/02 – June/03
   - No. of communities visited: 142
   - No. of individuals oriented: 2,416
   - No. of referrals to the VRA: 577

2. **Low Income Residential Projects:**

   Period: September/02 – June/03
   - No. of residential projects visited: 105
   - No. of individuals oriented: 1,160
   - No. of referrals to the VRA: 253