

Vocational Rehabilitation Services Basics

Presentation by Nanna Hanchett, IDVR Field Services Chief

Nanna described the vocational rehabilitation (VR) offices around the state and what they do. Regional offices, sub-offices and the office of special programs (Treasure Valley) that includes School-to-Work transition. Other special programs include services for the blind and visually impaired and mental health.

Federal match is 78% federal to 22% state funds. VR must follow federal guidelines in the Rehabilitation Act. A person must meet VR eligibility under four components. The VR Counselor (VRC) determines if the person meets these criteria:

- The individual has a documented disability - from a specialist in that disability area, use existing or get additional documentation
- The disability creates a barrier to employment
- There is a need for VR services
- The individual can benefit from services

Look at all disabilities a person has and the functional limitation related to the disability that creates a barrier to employment.

Counselor looks at work history or no work history. The VRC has been trained and determining functional limitation is based on the counselor's professional knowledge in looking at the documentation. Other avenues can be used to determine eligibility including using medical consultants (contracted) and doing additional evaluations/work evaluations. All functional limitations are considered based on the impact to employment. Also if the accommodation someone needs is significant enough to need VR services. All of the documentation and evaluation is to determine if the individual needs VR services to become a "competitive applicant."

Will the individual benefit from services? Prognosis is such that they will be able to benefit. Before deciding that an individual will not benefit, the VRC has to go through a process to determine that they will not benefit even with services. If an individual needs long term supports to benefit and those supports are not available. VR is obligated to secure long term funding source. If unable to secure long term funding, VR has to close file until that funding is found. In order to benefit, they need long term support/services.

Kinds of long term support sources:

- Medicaid Developmental Disability Waiver
- Medicaid Aged & Disabled Waiver

- Extended Employment Services
- Private Pay
- Natural Support

VR would need to determine if the individual is Medicaid waiver eligible. Can't assume the employer will provide natural support. Might consider this a long term support if an employer provided a letter saying how they would provide natural support. Team members/family if shown in a good plan or self-employment.

Everything is individualized. "In order to be successful you need this strategy" is not always known up front but might be found through process. Community Supported Employment (CSE) would be considered a strategy, natural support would be a strategy. Two strategies: with supports or without supports. The customer's best interest in mind when considering strategies. May start with least restrictive but will also consider additional, more intensive strategies.

ISSUE: Want to avoid scenarios where long term funding is identified through CSE or other source on the plan, VR does all the upfront job development services to get the person a job and then when it comes time to have long term work support engaged on plan, the individual/family decides not to change (or give up) a different community service. Examples seen include that a person has developmental therapy or other community services during process to develop job, then they have a mix - "best of both worlds" for a while and then when VR service is done, money has to shift in the Individual Service Plan and their services will change.

If a person makes work a priority, shift services earlier in process. Being available to work on vocational skills, career exploration, etc. DDA would have to be willing to give up the developmental therapy time. A person would spend more time working with a CRP employment specialist or career counselor. Soft skills for work – through DDA. Nanna said that for VR, the Targeted Service Coordinator (TSC) can be sticking point. Difficult to have them submit things in specific time frames. Jean – you have to build an addendum to plan (to add CSE), review time is 15 days. Before VR job coaching ends, the TSC needs to plan ahead to get addendum submitted in plenty of time.

TSC's need training about work and what work means. Also how to submit paperwork for switch from VR job coaching to CSE. Work is employment it is not a way to "fill time." TSC's are employed by agencies so approaching agencies would be a strategy.

Cassie reported that VRC's are saying "you have 2 weeks" of job development hours. Nanna will make sure that communication is improved because plans are individualized and additional hours may be requested as needed.

Group discussed need to build more services into 1915i waiver.

Question about the concept "individual will benefit from services" – that means with or without supports the person will be able to do the job.

Timeframes:

- Application complete.
- 60 days to determine eligibility.
- Individual is made eligible.
- Plan Development = 120 days or less.
 - Build foundation – solid plan leads to an employment outcome:

Comprehensive Assessment – align needs to job elements:

- Individual:
 - Evaluate what the customer wants to do and what fits.
 - Customer – as an individual and a worker: interests, aptitude, educational level, family and social support, abilities
 - Take into consideration functional needs
 - Work schedule preferences
 - Economic goal
- Job:
 - Educational requirement
 - Work environment
 - Pay level
 - Physical requirements
 - Inter personal requirements
 - Upward mobility potential

Look at what fits/matches between "you" and "job" and then identify gaps. The intent of VR services is to fill "gaps" between person and the job. The services to fill gaps become what is on the individual's plan. Education – do they have the ability to achieve the level of education needed. Not always just about the financial support for education/training but also feasibility.

VR does not pay for daily living needs. Sometimes this is a barrier to moving forward with employment.

The plan is a back and forth conversation between Counselor and Individual, it is an agreement.

Work evaluation can happen at different times: to determine eligibility and level of service need or during comprehensive assessment as part of plan development to determine functional needs.

Plan developed is approved by VRC/Regional Manager/Counselor with Authority and customer (and guardian as appropriate). Plan is then implemented. It can be 6 months or 5 years – it is individualized and can be amended. Must have employment goal.

Plan describes service, start date of service, and quantity of service. VRC's follow a policy plan and can only write certain things up to a certain level and then must get a higher level of authority. When you get to the end of a timeframe the request for more hours in a certain service is a way to visit if the service is working.

Part of plan is the customer's financial participation and VR's financial participation (up to 90%). Customer participation can be applying for financial aid/grants for educational training. Grant funding must go to tuition or books (not dormitory which is daily living).

Once a person is in employment there is a 90 day (minimum time frame) before case can be closed.

Nanna had to leave and after a short break, the group discussed some of the ideas we heard and issues related to current process.

Group Discussion

Overcoming barriers to VR opening a case:

Modify template for Individual Service Plan (ISP) to identify services that are vocational with an intent to work and reach employment goals.

Counselor may decide that because of barriers with significant disabilities (behavioral etc.) that certain things need to be addressed with developmental therapy or similar services before they can benefit from VR services.

What about individuals with intellectual disabilities? How to challenge VRC decision that they won't benefit without long-term services. Is there way to convince them to do a trial work period to determine need for long term support? Some VRC's look to the customer to determine they are motivated to work as part of determining if they will benefit. Can't require to do things like Work Strides before completing application process. Some VRC's ask customers to do certain things. Showing how you will be able to participate in your plan/job

search activities etc., is very individualized. There is an expectation that people will participate in the process: Are you willing to meet with your Employment Specialist? Are you able to pick up applications? Is this “jumping through hoops” in application process or later before moving forward to develop plan? [Need to take specifics to Nanna](#) – examples of how this has been happening.

Talked about the vocational rehabilitation Work Strides classes. VRC's facilitate classes.

Targeted Service Coordinators as a possible barrier:

How do TSC's get training – are there Medicaid requirements for training? No requirement for training. Can we set up parameters in rule? It is the responsibility of the TSC agency to make sure people are trained or know how to do their job. Can't use Medicaid dollars to pay for training. How to support training to be implemented around the state. ([Talk to Trina](#) about presentation she did at Tools. U of I training with certificate for online training.) The agency would have to make that a priority for their TSC's and staff. Everybody on the planning team has to be willing to make the shift to work focus with their services. Some DDA's don't want to give up their billable hours. Change how developmental therapy would look when using those services to build vocational skills and career exploration. Suggestions on how to use the services under 1915i instead of continuing to call it developmental therapy.

School-based Medicaid Services:

Can school districts use their DT services for work goals? All DT is under 1915i authority. Kids part has different rules. Art Evans is Bureau chief over both. It is key to make shift with children because that is what will make an impact later. Could start as early as elementary school. To find out more about school-based services Jean suggested we [invite](#) Bobbie Hamilton or Freddie ____ - Alternative Care Coordinator for Children's Services Redesign. Freddie might be better. Also Shannon Dunstan from SDE.

Also [invite Katherine Hansen](#) to do presentation on how Medicaid and VR fit together – she did this for a different group. It included the financial piece.

Build the VR plan with consult from benefits planner. To overcome possible, real or perceived, barrier to working more than a few hours a week. Also need to help young adults make transition from thinking about school schedule. Giving up other community activities to be more available for work. Respect their lives – sometimes their access to social activities, transportation, etc. Think about the richness of their life. SSI benefits are only \$720/month – they are forced to think of employment because of limited resources. Work to the best of your ability related to your disability. Let your disability determine how much you can work. Make it fit within the nature of your disability. Consider accommodations, AT, etc that can help

meliorate impact. If basic needs are not being met, how much of your time can be spent looking for a job? SSI eligibility also includes food stamps and housing benefits and loss of those things.

Also talk about the benefits of work. It starts at 3rd grade (Monique). Having conversation about benefit of becoming eligible for SSA benefits even if you don't use the benefits.

VR policy manual is available online and includes description of what VR might pay for. Just because it is in the manual it may not be specific to that individual. Depends on whether they are an SSI beneficiary as to how they need to meet their financial part of the plan. VR is eligibility-based, not entitlement.

Updates:

H476 legislation allowing Medicaid budget modifications for Community Supported Employment services was passed by the legislature and a small group will be working on rules for exception review. CSE is available under the DD Waiver and the A&D Waiver. Will be developing a purpose etc. during rule development. Will not stray from the narrow scope of the legislation. Will be done through an exception review – documentation provided with plan submission.

A person can approach VR for self-employment but you have to come with market research and a good, viable business plan, or demonstration of viability.

Suggestion to continue to pursue Small Business Development Center participation in IEFC. Or have them come and do a presentation and discussion with us.

Would like Nanna to come back to continue discussion about VR services. We are looking for a menu (? – can't remember what we meant by "menu"), ideas about options for a plan and some case examples, etc.

Group discussed that some individuals need support to even understand and access the program and process. Natural supports, like parents/family members, supporting communication and organization.

Tools for Life conference: There were around 350 participants. Important to invite schools from the reservation. Dina said that Fort Hall teachers said they didn't know about it. She means the reservation school that is not part of the Blackfoot school district. 200 Moving On transition binders were distributed. The binder is not revised every year. There is a downloadable and digital version on the Idaho Training Clearinghouse – here is the weblink:

<http://idahotc.com/secondary-transition/Documents.aspx#2155193-moving-on-binder>. It is possible to create a supplemental folder of new information. Alison thinks of it as an every 4 year process. Tools emphasis on assistive technology was good – learned a lot. Session on smart pens. It is a real pen that you write with that has a camera built in. You use special paper. It also has a voice recording feature to hear speaker/presenter. You can go back to the place in your handwritten notes and press to play what was said at that time. Can download notes from pen to the computer and then handwriting to text.

Employment Learning Community: Tracy call with Karen next week. Folks asked to have the notes that everyone submitted at the September meeting with Karen sent out again.

Tracy and Gordon said that the recent **ODEP webinar** on developing a quality, sustained, work force was good. A link will be available soon for the archived information – Tracy will send this out.

NSTTAC Conference: Idaho is sending a team to the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center conference in North Carolina. The team includes Alison, Tracy, Nanna, a community transition teacher (Blaine County), and a special education administrator. It is a venue for Idaho to create a secondary education state plan for the next year. Develop goals based on data. This year the focus will be college and career readiness and improving post-school outcomes. Emphasis on employment and post-secondary education/training.

Post-school Outcomes Survey: Tracy read the questions that are included on the current SDE post-school survey. Mostly done as telephone interviews. Some of the later questions are optional. As soon as available, [Alison will send group the current survey questions.](#)

Public Forums: Noll – public forum in Pocatello was only a couple of people. In Idaho Falls, we had a good turnout. Noll has two forums coming up: Moscow – 29th of March, Twin Falls – April 11th. Suggestions to send out notice about different ways people can provide input. Tracy is making the survey available through Survey Monkey and a link will be sent out. **(This was done shortly after the meeting and you all should have received the email from Noll.)**

SSI system safety net: unsuccessful work attempt within first 6 months (can have more than one – Scott checking) and within 5 years – expedited re-instatement without having to go through the paperwork again and benefits (based on your request for re-instatement) for a certain amount of time while having medical review. If review determines not eligible, you don't have to pay those benefits back.

Scott reported on recent work incentives workshop. Caldwell public library hosted Caldwell and Vallivue High School to have Scott do presentation to 30 people about work incentives.

Tracy said that it would be great if everyone could provide Alison with any information related to activities with school districts so she can include it in her federal report.

Work Incentives Workgroup:

Monique reported her role at the State Independent Living Council (SILC) has changed. The Medicaid Infrastructure Grant has ended, and other grant she was on is ending April 30th – she has met her goals. She is looking for a new job at this time. She is still working at the SILC for now, but not working on the employment activities she was before. Monique has asked Scott and Dina to lead the workgroup moving forward.

The workgroup has the list of people doing benefits planning around the state and what their certification or training has been. Next step is to identify who needs additional training and what format they need. Had discussed developing an Idaho train-the-trainer, but that is a daunting effort, so the group is now looking at using a national training like VCU and Cornell. Would be helpful for IEFC to decide what we want to do to ensure benefits planners have the training needed to provide benefits counseling. Look at models from other states to help with decision. Would like to have consistency between counselors and information shared. Laurie Ford at Washington and Molly Sullivan at VCU/Griffin Hammis are willing to help. Develop a criteria or standard for Idaho benefits counselors. Maybe provide guidelines and standardize a packet that is provided to individuals. Maintain credibility of service. 12 people from Idaho started Cornell training in January facilitated through ACCSES Idaho. [Lori Gentillon is going to join the Work Incentives Workgroup.](#)

Discussion about including benefits counseling services under Medicaid waiver. Also other sources for paying for service. Under Ticket to Work within an Employment Network – can be reimbursed after person is employed and meeting SGA (substantial gainful employment). SSA can reimburse VR and then funds go back into services.

Tracy described **marketing** efforts including a presentation to the ACCSES Idaho group at their quarterly meeting and having an exhibit table at the Tools for Life conference. Gordon presented to the Workforce Development Council and provided materials.

Transition Workgroup: Tracy and Jacque reported on Transition Workgroup activities – the group has met twice. The group is looking at two main goals: creating a career readiness class in high school for which students could get graduation credit and maybe even dual credit with a community college, and developing paid work experience for students before they leave high school.

Discussion about community colleges and vocational training program access for students in the trades. Looking at DOL data and talking to DOL staff about areas to pursue. They know more about what is happening now and in that area.

Scott mentioned Upward Bound program – for students as they are leaving high school. For low-income and at risk youth. During summer program they visit post-secondary options. People forget that students with disabilities are eligible for these federally funded programs.

Tracy has been looking at information about how to develop Community Action Teams. These teams work on planning with individuals for employment and connecting them to local community resources to help them reach their goals.

What about training on how to use social media for employment? How can people learn about the number of resources available and how to use them like: LinkedIn, Facebook, etc. Jobs are about “who you know.” Social media expands your social network for work networking. Importance of explaining how to network for youth and young adults. Need to identify trainers who are young or very involved in the “new rules” for using technology and social media related to work and job search.

Next Meeting: **April 10th**

Suggested dates for future meetings: **May 22nd, June 20th**