



# Vocational Rehabilitation (VR): A Young Adult's Guide

The Word on Work - Tip Sheet 6

TRANSITIONS RTC

April 2012

*Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Agencies are located in every US state. VR helps people with physical or mental health disabilities achieve employment and live independently by offering vocational counseling and related individualized services. The information below explains how young adults with serious mental health conditions can take advantage of the VR services in their state.*

## What support services can I get from my state VR agency?



**Transition Services:** These are a variety of services students with disabilities use to make the adjustment from school to work after high school; VR can work with students and their special education teachers to develop an Individualized Education Transition Plan (IETP). VR will consider providing any service that is needed to achieve the agreed upon vocational goal.

**Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE):** This is the map for achieving your vocational goal, which when reached, will help you work and live as independently as possible. The IPE includes: work goals, steps and services to reach your goal, time frames, cost of services and who will pay, and your responsibilities for carrying out those plans.

**Funding for Other Needed Services to Help You Work:** The VR agency may be able to provide financial assistance for the services in your IPE such as training and post-secondary education, transportation, supplies, job search assistance, and assistive technology.

**Vocational Counseling:** VR can also help you decide what kinds of jobs or careers make the most sense for you. This could happen by talking it through with the counselor or taking tests to help you figure out how your interests and skills fit into different types of jobs.

**Job Development:** This includes job searching, skills training, resumé preparation, and placement into a desired position. Your VR counselor may refer you to job developers who work for the VR agency when you are ready to begin a job search.

**Post-Employment Services:** One or more short term VR services that help you to maintain, regain, or advance in employment.

**Other services:** To see information about more services offered by your state, contact your state Vocational Rehabilitation office or search for your state VR agency online. You can find a listing of state agencies at: Job Accommodations Network (JAN): <http://askjan.org/cgi-win/TypeQuery.exe?902>

## Tips From People Who Found Jobs Through the VR Program:

**Flexibility:** Be flexible about what services you ask for.

**Ask questions:** Make a list of questions to ask whenever you meet with the counselor or other VR staff and find out about your options, both pros and cons, so you can make informed decisions.

**Communicate with your VR Counselor:** Ask for the best way to contact them: email, phone, texting, etc. Identify your needs and ask for help.

**Advocate for yourself:** Contact the office supervisor if you are having problems with your counselor.

**Talk to your peers:** See what their experience was like using VR services to get a job.

**Be Organized:** Make a calendar and mark appointments. Keep a folder for VR paperwork. Take notes during meetings.

## What do I need to be eligible for VR?

- You need medical documentation of a physical or mental disability that causes significant barriers to working/employment.
- You need a determination that VR services are needed for you to get a job or keep working.
- Individuals who receive SSI or SSDI usually also qualify for VR services.
- The time frame to either deny or accept an application is usually 60 days. Certain groups of people with a disability may have priority to get services and there may also be a wait list for services.
- For more eligibility or application information, check out your state VR website or handbook.
- If you were determined not qualified, you can appeal the process using The Client Assistance Program (CAP). Please see additional information on the next page.



## What is the VR process?

1. The VR counselor will outline available services during a group or individual meeting.
2. Once you are determined to be eligible, an initial interview will be scheduled with a VR counselor.
3. Your VR counselor and you will develop your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), which includes your chosen job goal and all the services needed to achieve that goal.
4. You meet periodically with your counselor to reach your goal.
5. VR services last until employment has been maintained for at least 90 days and you and your counselor agree that you are performing well on the job, **or** your case file is closed for lack of cooperation on your part or other reasons.

## What are the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors' responsibilities?

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- Inform you of resources available to you and give you specific help in connecting with them
- Provide information on your rights and legal information, such as the appeals process, and the Client Assistance Program (CAP)
- Participate with you in the development of an IPE which you and your VR Counselor will sign. Give you a copy of the IPE and all subsequent amendments and reviews
- Assist in the coordination of IPE services and review your progress; at least annually
- Keep you fully informed throughout the VR process, including the opportunity to talk about why your case is being closed when that time comes

## What can I do if VR services do not meet my needs?

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Discuss your questions with your VR counselor.

Ask for whatever you think your needs are. As tax payers, the VR system belongs to all of us.

If dissatisfied, you can speak to the supervisor or request a change in counselors.

Contact your local Client Assistance Program (CAP), some decisions and problems can be appealed.

Get informed about your state VR agency. You can get help from advocacy organizations like the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI).<sup>1</sup>



## Where Else Can I Get Help If Problems Occur With My VR Services?

**The Client Assistance Program (CAP)** is a program for persons with disabilities who are applicants or clients of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) or Independent Living programs. CAP:

- Provides information about Vocational Rehabilitation Services
- Advises you on your rights and responsibilities and investigates your complaint
- Assists in resolving problems with your counselor during any part of the process
- Helps you write a formal request for appeal and move your concerns through the system<sup>2</sup>
- Represents you at administrative reviews, mediations and a formal appeals hearing

## How do I find my state agency?

To find your state agency, a listing is available at Job Accommodations Network (JAN):

<http://askjan.org/cgi-win/TypeQuery.exe?902>

### Sources:

Office of Special Education Rehabilitation Services:

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rsa/index.html>

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Youth and Transition Services:

[http://www.maine.gov/rehab/dvr/youth\\_transition.shtml](http://www.maine.gov/rehab/dvr/youth_transition.shtml)

Vocational Rehabilitation Services for High School Students with a Disability: <http://www.mass.gov/>

Vocational Rehabilitation Services: <http://dhs.sd.gov/drs/vocrehab/vr.aspx>

Consumer's Rights in the Rehabilitation Process: <http://www.ovrgov.net/consumer.aspx>

Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE):

[http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/cbvh/vocrehab\\_manual/06\\_IPE.htm](http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/cbvh/vocrehab_manual/06_IPE.htm)

Department of Rehabilitation Services Client Assistant Program:

<http://www.dors.state.md.us/DORS/ProgramServices/cap/expect.htm>

Getting the Most from the Public Vocational Rehabilitation System:

[http://www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article\\_id=129](http://www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=129)

Massachusetts Consumer Handbook for Rehabilitation (VR) Services:

<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/disability-services/vocational-rehab/consumer-handbook.html#3>

Vermont Policy and Procedure Manual: <http://vocrehab.vermont.gov/whoware/policyprocedure>

California Department Of Rehabilitation Regulations: <http://www.dor.ca.gov/exec/proregul.htm>

We wish to acknowledge the helpful revisions from: Joseph Marrone and Neil McNeil (Institute for Community Inclusion, Boston).



### Visit Transitions RTC online at <http://labs.umassmed.edu/transitionsRTC>

Recommended citation: Whitney, J., Smith, L. M. & Duperoy, T. (2012). Vocational Rehabilitation (VR): A Young Adults Guide. The Word on Work. Tip Sheet # 6. Worcester, MA: University of Massachusetts Medical School, Department of Psychiatry, Center for Mental Health Services Research, Transitions Research and Training Center.  
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The contents of this tip sheet were developed with funding from the US Department of Education, National Institute on Disability & Rehabilitation Research, and the Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (NIDRR grant H133B090018). Additional funding provided by UMass Medical School's Commonwealth Medicine division. The content of this tip sheet does not necessarily reflect the views of the funding agencies and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.



The Transition RTC is part of the Center for Mental Health Services Research, a Massachusetts Department of Mental Health Research Center of Excellence

1. To find your local NAMI, please visit: [http://www.nami.org/template.cfm?section=your\\_local\\_nami](http://www.nami.org/template.cfm?section=your_local_nami)
2. Appeal processes in Vocational Rehabilitation programs differ by state; check with your local office. A good guide is available at [www.dors.state.md.us/DORS/ProgramServices/cap/expect.htm](http://www.dors.state.md.us/DORS/ProgramServices/cap/expect.htm)