

# Rehabilitation Services

## **TITLE: Vocational Rehabilitation Services: Can It Help You?**

**MODULE GOAL(S):** This module will inform you about the vocational rehabilitation services available for you as you transition to postsecondary options. It is designed to increase your knowledge about the services and to help you plan ahead. These include services for:

- Postsecondary education
- Vocational education or training
- Continuing and adult education
- Integrated or supported employment
- Independent living and adult services
- Community participation

## **OBJECTIVE(S):**

1. Explain what you need to know about postsecondary transition
2. Describe vocational rehabilitation and explain its importance to you
3. Explain how you can become eligible for vocational rehabilitation services
4. Explain the vocational rehabilitation service application process
5. Identify the vocational rehabilitation programs and services
6. Identify the state vocational rehabilitation services
7. Provide an on-line dictionary of relevant terminologies

## **INTRODUCTION:**

Now that you have completed transition to high school your next big step is to prepare for transition to your postsecondary years. Your first experience with transition may or may not have been successful. You may or may not have received the supports you needed, or gained access to all the available services. However, it is again time to start thinking about postsecondary options, transition, programs, and services. You, your parents, your counselor and the transition team will consider the programs that are available for you and help you get the right services.

Students with disabilities preparing for postsecondary options require supports as they transition to life beyond high school. The last two years in secondary school involves planning, researching, analyzing, coordinating, and deciding on which pathway to pursue. Often, students and their parents are not aware of the many services that are available to them and do not know how to access these supports. You, your parents and the transition team will work together collaboratively to assist in identifying, accessing, and obtaining those available services. Your state Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) can provide you with Vocational Rehabilitation.

### **KEY QUESTIONS:**

Some significant questions you will have are:

1. What do I need to know about postsecondary transition?
2. What is vocational rehabilitation and why is it important to me?
3. How do I become eligible for rehabilitation services?
4. How do I apply for services?
5. What programs and services exist to help me?
6. How can I access these services in my state?
7. What terminologies do I need to know?

### **What do I need to know about postsecondary transition?**

The transition process from high school to the postsecondary life is a major step for you and your family. It involves making important decisions regarding planning activities for your adult life. These decisions may include making decisions about postsecondary education, vocational education or training, supported and integrated employment, continuing and adult education, independent living, and participation in community involvement and adult services. Although this planning seems to be a lot to think about and is challenging, support is available for you through your high school, adult agencies, and the community. The process starts early in high school with you, your family, your school counselor, and the transition team. Federal and state laws and agencies play an important role in passing, directing, providing, and supervising your programs, supports and services.

The special education law, Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA, 2004), says that as you prepare for further education, employment, or independent living you should receive transition services that work, to help you in postsecondary settings. It requires that your high school begins the process that will provide you and all students with disabilities the

right to enjoy self-determination, make choices, contribute to society, and to be fully included in society. These laws focus on helping you get transition services to be successful after high school. This means, your high school transition team will start planning with you and your parents before you leave high school to help you get these supports, if you are eligible. You can get support for instruction, related services, community experiences, job development and job placement, adult living, daily living skills, and functional vocational evaluation.

As you transition from high school to your postsecondary setting you want to know there will be no gaps in your services. You need to make the right choices and connections before you leave school, have the transition team contact the appropriate agencies, and have your services written in a plan. These will help to make sure you made the right choices and that you have a successful transition. For many students, some of these services may begin during the last two years of their high school, and the process could start even earlier. Getting these services coordinated, while still in school, with support from the teacher and the transition team helps to reduce the challenges that you may face as you prepare to move on to adult life.

The IDEA (2004) law requires that as soon as you turn 16-years old, or even younger, your IEP must include goals you can reach, and services to help you reach those goals. Your goals must be based on assessments you receive at your transition age. The assessments may be for training, education, employment, or independent living. To help you make your own choices and help you participate in your self-determination, the law states that no later than one year before you reach adulthood you must be informed of your rights that you can make your own decisions, as soon as you become an adult. In some states, when you become an adult you reach the '**age of majority**'. This means at age 18 (or 19 or 21 in some states) your rights to make your own educational, employment or independent living decisions are given to you, and you may no longer be under IDEA.

### **What are rehabilitation services and why are they important to me?**

Rehabilitation Services is one of the many programs available to you as you transition from high school to postsecondary settings. It is available through your state and is referred to as Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services. Your state VR agencies receive funds from the federal government because of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended, to manage this program, and the Department of Education supervises it. The purpose of the VR program is to assess, plan, develop, and provide services to you, if you are eligible, in order to prepare

you for employment, place you in a job, and increase your independence and integration into the workplace and the community.

Understanding about Vocational Rehabilitation is important to you because the laws and services for secondary and postsecondary settings are different. The laws that protected your rights in high school no longer protect you in postsecondary settings. In the postsecondary setting you will be protected by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disability Act, the Job Training Improvement Act of 2005, the Workforce Investment Act Amendment Act of 2005, and the Higher Education Act (see The GW HEATH Resource Center for more about the laws). Unless you, your family, and your transition team make a good plan, you will have to self-advocate or speak up for yourself to protect your rights and get your services. You will have to choose to get services from the Vocational Rehabilitation program.

It is important for you and your parents to know that in your postsecondary setting you will have to meet the **eligibility** standards the law requires. That means you will need to qualify. This is different from your high school setting. In high school you are **entitled** to your special education services. That means the law says you must be allowed a free and appropriate education.

### **How do I become eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services?**

To become eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services you must (1) have a physical, mental, emotional, or learning disability that is areal barrier to you getting a job, (2) need Vocational Rehabilitation services to prepare you to get, keep, or regain employment, and (3) be able to benefit from the services that will assist you to get and keep the job or benefit from independent living. If you receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) you are considered to be eligible. Students who are in special education programs, receive accommodations in school, or have a severe health condition may be eligible.

Not everyone who is eligible will receive services. Vocational Rehabilitation service is provided to only a small percent of the millions of people who may be eligible. Because funding is not available to serve everyone, students with the most severe disabilities, who can benefit, will get help first. This means even if you are eligible you may not get services. When you apply you are placed on a waiting list and you may get services based on an **'order of selection'**. The decision is made on a case-by-case basis. This means each

case is treated individually. You and your parents should start collecting state and federal information about Vocational Rehabilitation programs early. The eligibility demand changes from state to state. Many students apply, are denied, and have to apply again and again. You and your parents will need to keep following-up with your case.

The law requires that your records from your present job or community experiences can be used to determine eligibility. Your work and community records should be given to the Vocational Rehabilitation agency if you are referred. You, your parents, an advocate, or an educational agency can provide these records to your vocational rehabilitation counselor. Your high school should gather and keep records that can help to support your needs and goals for employment. You and your parents should keep copies of these records. In many states the special education department, the Vocational Rehabilitation services, and the vocational-technical education work together to help students with disabilities have a smooth transition to Vocational Rehabilitation programs.

### **How do I apply for Vocational Rehabilitation services?**

You and your parents can send a written application and meet with the agency staff on your own. Someone from your school or from your transition team can send the written application and make the referral. You will get an eligibility determination or a response within 60 days after you applied, unless you and your Vocational Rehabilitation counselor agreed to an extension. You will need to give the Vocational Rehabilitation counselor permission to get copies of your records from your high school. The application process for each state is different, so begin early.

If you start the application process early, you will receive assessments in order to write the goals you will need for your postsecondary setting. The goals will be written in your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) and will agree with your strengths, resources, concerns, abilities, interests, priorities, and informed choice. The law requires that your plan is developed and signed by you and your Vocational Rehabilitation counselor. Your parents may be a part of the team. Because the law requires that your high school Individualized Education Plan (IEP) matches with your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), you, your parents, your transition team, and the Vocational Rehabilitation agencies must **collaborate** or work together.

## What programs and services exist to help me?

The law requires that you receive programs or services you may need to get and keep a job, or for independent living. These programs and services are different from state to state but may include:

- **Vocational counseling, guidance and referral services** – vocational rehabilitation counselors will talk with you to see what your skills and interests are, help you choose your work goals, and help you plan your program of services.
- **Assessments** to determine your eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs – assessments such as career assessments and functional vocational evaluation will help to find out more about your interests, skills and abilities.
- **Physical and mental rehabilitation services** – such as help with getting eyeglasses, visual services, treatment for mental health, or speech therapy.
- **Interpreter services** for students who are deaf
- **Reader services** for students who are blind
- **Transportation** related to other vocational rehabilitation services – in some instances you will get pay for the cost of transportation while you are taking part in other vocational rehabilitation programs
- **Maintenance for additional costs incurred** while receiving certain vocational rehabilitation services
- **Programs and classes** that teach job skills such as vocational and other training, including on-the-job training
- **Supported employment services**, including **job coach** – you will receive these services for as long as you need them to help you keep the job
- **Job placement services**- you will get help in job seeking and job-keeping skills such as job development, job placement assistance, and job maintenance
- **Personal assistant services** – you will receive workplace personal assistant services (**WPAS**) such as a work task-related assistant, a reader, an interpreter, help with lifting or reaching work-related items, a personal care assistant, or a travel assistant. These services include training for managing, supervising, and directing your personal assistance services.
- **Rehabilitation technology services and devices** – you will receive assistive technology, special devices or accommodations to do the job, including enlarged print, TDD, or raising a desk for a wheelchair.

- **Independent living programs** – to assess your independent living needs and identify barriers to employment, to make adjustments to your home to help you better manage tasks and work more efficiently
- **Services to assist students with disabilities transition from school to work**

The Workforce Investment Act Amendment of 2005 (WIA) has the partnership and participation of Vocational Rehabilitation through the [One-Stop Career Centers](#) .This Act improved the centers and requires that they provide full services to you such as counseling, benefits, job training, postsecondary education and training, and other services. The centers will help you to get higher-paying employment and encourage businesses to get you involved in workforce training. It provides services to youth from 14 years of age. (Sitlington & Clark, 2006)

The Job Training Improvement Act of 2005 (JTIA) requires that the vocational rehabilitation services you receive are assessed to see how well they are working and how well those services are matched with your IEP. This Act also makes funds available for your state to provide transition services to you as you prepare for postsecondary education, employment, or independent living.

### **How can I access these services in my state?**

The services are different in each state based on their funding. To find your state visit:

- <http://askjan.org/>
- [http://www.workworld.org/wwwwebhelp/state\\_vocational\\_rehabilitation\\_vr\\_agencies.htm](http://www.workworld.org/wwwwebhelp/state_vocational_rehabilitation_vr_agencies.htm)

Examples of State VRS agencies:

Arizona: <https://www.azdes.gov/rsa/VR/>

Maryland: <http://www.dors.state.md.us/dors>

Virginia: <http://www.vadrs.org/>

District of Columbia: <http://dds.dc.gov/DC/DDS>

New York: <http://www.acces.nysed.gov/vr/>

Kansas: <http://www.srs.ks.gov/Pages/Default.aspx>

Nebraska: <http://www.vocrehab.state.ne.us/>

### **ONLINE RESOURCES:**

These websites can give you helpful information:

U.S. Department of Education web site on IDEA 2004:  
<http://idea.ed.gov/>

Students with Disabilities Preparing for Secondary Education: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities:  
<http://www2.ed.gov/print/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html>

Transition of Students with Disabilities to Postsecondary Education: A Guide for High School Educators:  
<http://www2.ed.gov/print/about/offices/list/ocr/transitionguide.html>

Auxiliary Aids and Services for Postsecondary Students with Disabilities:  
<http://www2.ed.gov/print/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/auxaids.html>

Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)  
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rsa/index.html>

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About RSA:  
<http://www2.ed.gov/print/about/offices/list/osers/rsa/faq.html>

National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR)/Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) About NIDRR:  
<http://www2.ed.gov/print/about/offices/list/osers/nidrr/faq.html>

The George Washington University Disability Support Services (DSS):  
<http://gwired.gwu.edu/dss/>

Institute on Community Inclusion  
[http://www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article\\_id=178](http://www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=178)

Council for Exceptional Children-Division on Career Development and Transition:  
<http://www.dcdt.org/>

Transitions Considerations Checklist  
<http://www.ncld.org/publications-a-more/checklists-worksheets-a-forms/transition-considerations-checklist>

To learn more about the High School/High Tech (HS/HT) program, the *Guideposts for Success*, and NCWD/Youth, visit:  
<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/>

The Post-outcomes network:

Job Accommodation Network for assistive technology and accommodations:

<http://askjan.org/>

National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials guides production and distribution of digital texts and other materials:

<http://aim.cast.org/>

Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America:

<http://www.resna.org/>

Association of Higher Education and Disability:

<http://www.ahead.org/>

American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today:

<http://www.adapt.org/>

PASS Plans allow a person with disabilities to set aside income or resources for a period of time to achieve a work goal: <http://www.passplan.org/>

Presented by the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration on: Overview of the Public Vocational Rehabilitation Program

[http://www.rcepv.siu.edu/oviewvr04\\_30\\_99.ppt](http://www.rcepv.siu.edu/oviewvr04_30_99.ppt)

## **ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION:**

Now that you read this module, use the following steps to develop a plan of action for exploring these services.

1. Explain the importance of vocational rehabilitation to your family and why you need it.
2. Visit a postsecondary setting that you would like to move on to and talk with someone.
3. Learn more about vocational rehabilitation by exploring the online resources.
4. Follow the sample letter and write one for yourself that you can use.
5. Read the case scenarios and answer the questions to give you insight for your planning.
6. Talk with your transition specialist, vocational rehabilitation counselor, or school counselor about your interest in getting vocational rehabilitation services.
7. Consider starting to collect the records you will need for the process.

## **WRAP UP:**

Now that you read this training module about vocational rehabilitation services it is important that you:

1. Know the programs and services it provides and how to get them
2. Know the eligibility requirements and how to apply
3. Know the agencies and resources in your area
4. Determine early to choose to get the services
5. Know your rights as a person with a disability and how to self-advocate

## **REFERENCES:**

Sitlington, P. & Clark, G. (2006). *Transition Education and Services for Students with Disabilities*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. Boston: Pearson Education.

Trainor, A., Patton, J., & Clark, G. (2005). *Cases in Assessment for Transition Planning*. Austin, TX: Pro-ed, Inc.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services. Available at: <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/index.html>

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## **Case Scenario A**

Wayne is a 16-year old sophomore who is classified with a behavior disorder. He was first classified in fifth grade and has received instruction in self-contained classrooms and inclusive settings throughout his schooling. In high school, he has attended general

education classes in all subjects except English and study skills, which are in the special education department. The decision to place Wayne in a self-contained English class that serves students with a variety of disabilities was based on documentation of below-grade-level reading and written language skills. Wayne reports that he “hates” reading and writing tasks, although teachers observe that he often reads bodybuilding and gaming magazines that he brings to school from home.

Wayne typically isolates himself in the classroom. He is generally quiet, and he rarely engages in classroom activities or discussions with other students. He must be prompted to complete assignments, preferring to “just take a zero” for classroom activities and homework. His grades are not satisfactory; he is currently in danger of failing most subjects, many of which are his freshman level courses that he failed during the previous academic year. Wayne has an explosive temper. He was involved in a fist fight after school, and this behavior resulted in a suspension. He was also charged with assault and is now on probation through the juvenile justice department.

Wayne likes to draw, and he doodles incessantly. His special education teacher has encouraged him to enroll in art electives, but he refuses. His main recreational activities are playing video and online games and bodybuilding. Wayne has few career-related aspirations; he has told his parents that upon graduation he plans to “get a job”.

His parents are frustrated. In the past, they shared the information that Wayne does not perform household tasks independently, often necessitating prompting or behavioral consequences (e.g. grounding). Wayne’s mother said that she is exhausted from working full-time and caring for Wayne as if he were still a small child, preparing all his meals, cleaning his room, doing his laundry, and generally fulfilling his daily requirements. Although his parents care very much about their son, his disability has greatly affected the family dynamic. His parents are in the process of separating. Wayne’s mother, a nurse’s aide, received a warning from her boss that she can no longer miss work to attend parent-teacher conferences or emergency interventions regarding her son’s behavior. Wayne’s parents did not complete the home version of the *Transition Planning Inventory* (TPI). Previously, both parents indicated that Wayne was expected to move out at age 18 and maintain an independent household.

**Question:** What would be Wayne’s likely employment, further education, and living arrangements?

Source: Trainor, A., Patton, J., & Clark, G. (2005). Case Studies in Assessment for Transition Planning

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### **Case Scenario B**

Rose is a 16 year old high school student, of average intelligence, with multiple disabilities, who recently moved to the United States from Africa. She has a learning disability in reading and written language and would like to attend a community college to pursue a course in health occupations – medical secretary. She is currently enrolled in a departmentalized special education program (SPED) at her school and receives all of her core academic subjects in self-contained classes taught by SPED teachers to small groups. Her work is modified significantly and she receives tutoring and support one period a day in the resource room. In addition, she receives speech and language services to help improve her receptive and expressive language. Rose’s SPED teachers believe her goal is unrealistic because she lacks the necessary study skills to succeed in college classes. They are encouraging her to get a job as a hospitality receptionist.

Although Rose’s primary language is Creole, she was tested in English. Her IEP has several goals including transition goals for work experience in the school library. The guidance counselor and special education teacher developed the IEP and sent it home with Rose for the parent signature. The parent refuses to sign the IEP and complained that she requested updated testing with a Creole interpreter four months ago because she thinks her daughter should be in the general education classroom.

Rose is unable to walk unassisted and has limited use of her hands because of cerebral palsy. She uses a motorized wheelchair to transport herself at home and at school. With the strong support of her mother and the SPED team at school, Rose is self-mobile and independent.

Rose is using a computer with software programs that support her academic learning. The word-processing program includes word-prediction technology that allows Rose to type the first few letters of a word and then select the most appropriate word from a computer-

generated list, allowing her to complete more of her written assignments independently and on time.

**Question:** What post-secondary transition recommendations would you make for Rose?

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### **Sample Accommodation Request Letter**

***The following is an example of what can be included in an accommodation request letter and is not intended to be legal advice.***

Date of Letter

Your name

Your address

Employer's name

Employer's address

Dear (e.g., Supervisor, Manager, Human Resources, Personnel):

Content to consider in body of letter:

- Identify yourself as a person with a disability
- State that you are requesting accommodations under the ADA (or the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 if you are a federal employee)
- Identify your specific problematic job tasks
- Identify your accommodation ideas
- Request your employer's accommodation ideas
- Refer to attached medical documentation if appropriate\*
- Ask that your employer respond to your request in a reasonable amount of time

Sincerely,

Your signature

Your printed name

Cc: to appropriate individuals

You may want to attach medical information to your letter to help establish that you are a person with a disability and to document the need for accommodation.

Source: <http://askjan.org/>

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