In the Division of Rehabilitation Services’ (DRS) last edition of the VocRehab Perspective, the story, “Enabling West Virginia’s youth with disabilities to successfully transition from school to work,” explained how DRS and West Virginia’s school systems are working hand-in-hand to help students with disabilities make the challenging transition from school to employment.

That story focused primarily on the essential relationships that help bring awareness of DRS and the availability of vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities.

As students with disabilities are referred, they work with a DRS transition counselor who helps them apply for services to become a DRS client. To be eligible, a person must have a disability that is interfering with his or her ability to obtain or maintain employment. In fiscal year 2013, just over 42 percent of DRS clients were transition students with disabilities.

The primary goal of DRS in working with transitioning students is to help them identify a realistic employment goal and then to help them access necessary services and support that will enable them to reach their employment goal.

DRS transition counselors provide counseling and guidance to help students with disabilities identify their interests, skills and abilities and explore career opportunities and job requirements. They encourage students to participate in job fairs and job shadowing opportunities. They also urge students to research job market trends to ensure that there are jobs available in particular fields of interest.

Ultimately, the student and his or her transition counselor work together to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that identifies the student’s employment goal and the services needed to address disability-related barriers so the student can achieve that goal.

Counseling and guidance provided by DRS transition counselors is an essential part of the process. Transition students with disabilities may feel insecure about their capabilities. Generally, they lack work experience and knowledge about the world of work.

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Many of these students have gained some work experience through their high school’s school-to-work program. According to DRS Transition Counselor Kelli White, it’s important for counselors to capitalize on that work experience and the connection with an employer because it could potentially lead to a job for a client.

DRS assists transition students with disabilities in obtaining the appropriate training to help them realize their work goal.

DRS transition counselors work with students with disabilities who are preparing to go to college, those who are interested in some other type of post-secondary education and those who want to enter the workforce right after graduating from school.

A student who is preparing to go to college may need guidance about the steps it takes to get into college, including taking the required entrance exam and applying for financial aid. A student may need special accommodations due to a physical or learning disability. DRS transition counselors can help them prepare and access accommodation services that are available on most college campuses. DRS can provide financial support for college. Continual counseling and guidance throughout the student’s college career ensures adequate grades are maintained, thus enabling the student to successfully complete his or her degree.

For students who are pursuing post-secondary education at a vocational or trade school, DRS transition counselors may also need to help the student access special disability-related accommodations. Additionally, a student may need financial assistance to complete the training, as well as specific work-related tools to get started in a particular vocation.

White explains that “these programs are often short term in nature. However, counseling and guidance is very important to keep the student on track to complete his or her goal in a timely manner.”

For students with disabilities who are preparing to enter the workforce right after completing high school, the amount and type of needed services can vary. Many of these students have limited work experience and they may lack the skills necessary to adapt and adjust to social and environmental demands of a job. They may need assistance with developing work-related soft skills that can include appropriate workplace behavior and how to get along with others. Some may need help with résumé and job interviewing skills development. Others may need job placement assistance.

DRS has a team of employment specialists throughout the state that can provide help with résumé writing and job interviewing skills development. They can also help with job placement, providing job leads and making direct contacts with employers on a client’s behalf.

DRS also frequently utilizes Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP) to provide job development services, community-based assessments, work adjustment training, life skills development, job coaching and job placement services as needed to help a transitioning student with a disability enhance his or her employment skills and find a job.

The Student Transition to Employment Program (STEP) is another resource for helping students to transition directly into the workforce and it has shown great success.

STEP works with interested special education teachers, school transition teachers and/or teachers’ aides to help them become a Community Rehabilitation Program vendor through the state of West Virginia. This unique project allows participating teachers to work one-on-one with transition students with disabilities after school hours. They provide job placement services for students with which they already have a comfortable working relationship. They are paid by DRS on a fee-for-service basis for the services they provide to clients.

DRS Transition Counselor Paula Angiulli has worked with students with disabilities for 17 years and speaks highly of the program. “This has been one of the most positive experiences I have had thus far as a counselor,” said Angiulli.

Her clients receiving services through the program have been successful. “Each client most likely had...
already participated in the school-to-work program with teachers that are also involved in the STEP program,”
explained Angiulli. “And, each of them knew these clients individually and thus, were able to develop a job in the
community based on their experiences at previous worksites.”

Theresa Rapp is a career specialist at Huntington High School and she coordinates the Work-Based Community
Program for students with special needs. She works very closely with the DRS transition counselor with whom she
shares an office, referring her students to DRS for services when appropriate.

On her own time, Rapp works as a STEP vendor and has placed 12 students into jobs during the last two years.

Rapp spoke of one client who wanted to work in a restaurant. She helped him find a job at a local restaurant,
where he has successfully worked as a biscuit maker for the last year. She visited the employer with the client five
times, eventually convincing the manager to interview him. A recent follow-up discussion revealed the client’s
employment success. He has not been late for work or failed to report to work during his employment.

Rapp is pleased with his success and appreciates the relationship that DRS has with her school system. Working
together enables West Virginia’s students with disabilities to be better prepared to face the challenging transition
from school to work.

**DRS presents innovative practice in Germany**

The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) recently presented its Student Transition to
Employment Project (STEP) at the European Platform for Rehabilitation Conference in Cologne,
Germany.

European Platform representatives selected
DRS’ STEP project out of 12 proposals, using a
competitive nomination and selection process.
STEP utilizes special education teachers to provide
vocational rehabilitation services, such as job
development, job placement and job coaching, to
youth with disabilities to help them transition from
school to work.

STEP has previously been recognized as an
innovative and emerging practice by the University
of Massachusetts Rehabilitation Research and
Training Center and the Rehabilitation Services
Administration, who recognized the potential for its
replication.

DRS Director Donna Ashworth, Research
Specialist Douglas Snuffer and Community
Rehabilitation Programs Supervisor LuAnn Summers
attended the conference and presented information
about STEP June 26-27. Their attendance was
sponsored by the Council of State Administrators of
Vocational Rehabilitation.

The European Platform for Rehabilitation is a
network of service providers and professionals that
provide vocational, medical and social rehabilitation
services for people with disabilities. The European
Platform assists its member organizations to achieve
continuous professional improvement, best practice
and sustainable growth in every aspect of service
delivery to people with disabilities.

Countries represented in the European Platform
include France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands,
Ireland, Finland, Austria, the United Kingdom and
Portugal.

Over 130 delegates, including experts and
professors from the United States, Canada and Austria, attended the event.

The conference focused on the common challenges faced by European Platform members in assessing and demonstrating the impact of their activities.

Keynote speaker Dirk Jarré of Linz University in Austria explained that impact assessment “starts by replacing the purely economic triangle of ‘productivity – efficiency – profitability’ with a clear view of the needs of the users or clients. However, this does not mean losing sight of the important issues of investment and outcome, but change the perspective from the predominantly monetary perspective into a ‘human dignity’ approach.”

The conference consisted of six speed presentations followed by roundtable discussions to give participants the opportunity to further examine issues and different perspectives.

There were also five specific training sessions, including the STEP presentation by DRS, which offered concrete training and more in-depth analysis of different issues.

Musicians from the Netherlands livened up the first day of the conference during breaks. There was also a traditional dinner in a German brewery at the close of the first day.

According to DRS Director Donna Ashworth, “This was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. It was surreal to participate in discussions with people from all over the globe about the common issues facing the vocational rehabilitation field.”

“Everyone had such energy and positive attitudes toward addressing issues that are monumental undertakings, such as the integration of people with disabilities into schools, communities and the workforce,” said Ashworth. “A lot of these countries still have separate schools for people with disabilities. They really valued the advice and information that we presented. I would’ve loved to stay longer.”
West Virginia student transitioning to success

Benjamin Seebaugh, 23, found a way to make his disadvantages work for him.

At the age of 13, Seebaugh received a diagnosis of ADHD, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, which can manifest itself in symptoms including not being able to focus or control behavior and being overactive.

Seebaugh had set goals for his future and he did not want his diagnosis to prevent him from accomplishing those goals.

With support from his family, Seebaugh did all the right things to help him learn to manage his disability so he could stay focused on his future. He benefited from counseling, medication and coping mechanisms like writing things down, learning when to take breaks and developing time management skills.

When he was a senior at Parkersburg South High School, his teacher, Valerie Roberts, introduced his class to the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) by inviting Rehabilitation Counselor Karen Empfield to speak about the services that DRS can provide to those who are eligible.

Seebaugh’s disability made him eligible to receive support from DRS and he describes his experience with DRS as the first stepping stone that paved the way to the success he has achieved during his college career at West Virginia University (WVU). His accomplishments are vast and his focus is still on his future.

Seebaugh was one of nine students to receive the Order of Augusta honor, WVU’s top recognition for graduating students, when he graduated in May 2014. He graduated summa cum laude, earning three bachelor’s degrees in political science, in international studies and in women’s and gender studies.

Additionally, Seebaugh was nominated and selected to be the 2012 West Virginia Truman Scholar. Seebaugh explains that the “Truman scholarship is an annual scholarship provided by the federal government valued at up to $30,000, but more important than the financial aspect, is the network of the Truman Scholars Association. It’s for people who have invested in a public service career.”

Seebaugh will use the scholarship money to attend graduate school at Tufts University, through a program called Map Your Future, which requires enrollees to have field experience before obtaining their master’s degree. He will start in the fall of 2016, but in the meantime will be gaining experience in the public service field.

During his college career, Seebaugh earned several opportunities to travel and study abroad.

After completing his freshman year, Seebaugh was one of six WVU students selected to participate in a model United Nations conference in the Netherlands during the summer of 2010.

He earned the opportunity to work for the United States State Department in Vienna, Austria, working with the United Nations, during the summer of 2011.

Seebaugh traveled to Santander, Spain during the summer of 2012, where he studied the Spanish language and culture.

And, in the spring of 2013, he studied law for six months at the University of Manchester School of Law in England. He took classes in criminal law, law and ethics of war and warfare and tort law, which will continued on next page
Seebaugh is most proud that he was able to complete two major goals, both of which required a vast amount of time and hard work. First, he earned the Eagle Scout status through the Boy Scouts of America before he finished high school. And second, he considers being selected as the Truman Scholar as one of his greatest accomplishments.

Seebaugh's long-term goal is to “be a human rights officer for the United Nations, which would allow me to travel to conflict zones, developing nations, areas that are experiencing transitional powers, maybe they are moving from one leadership to another, and I would help make sure that human rights are being upheld and laws are being followed.” But, he recognizes that this may be 15 to 20 years down the line.

Beyond that, he wants to find a way to give back to West Virginia for all the support that he’s received.

Seebaugh wants to encourage people to “take whatever disadvantages you’re given and try and use them as a strength.”

“I almost got put in behavioral disorder classes in junior high school,” said Seebaugh. “My sixth grade year, I had more detention than anyone else in the entire school because I was blurt ing out, I couldn’t stay in my seat. So for a long time, I thought this was going to mess up my long-term life plan. But now, I have more energy than someone who doesn’t have a hyperactivity disorder.”

Seebaugh takes the support he received from DRS very seriously. “I was given a gift, so I feel the need to give that gift back and work as hard as I can to live up to the gift I’ve been given and the opportunities that have been provided to me.”

The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) sponsored a West Virginia Power baseball game at Appalachian Power Park on July 12 as part of its ongoing outreach efforts. The sponsorship allowed DRS the opportunity to disseminate information about its services and to promote hiring people with disabilities.

Steven Blanton, the 2013 Huntington District Ability Works Recognition winner, threw the game’s ceremonial first pitch. Vocational assistance from DRS helped Blanton address disability-related employment barriers and get a job with Sodexo Food Service in Marshall University’s Harless Dining Hall.
Of course, the answer is true because Franklin Delano Roosevelt did not regain the use of his legs after contracting polio.

In fact, the answer to all questions was true and the participants correctly responded to every statement. The participating kids received $10 worth of Chuck’s Bucks, compliments of DRS, to spend at the game.

In addition to all the activities, West Virginia Power and DRS sponsored a promotional giveaway, where the first 1,000 fans to arrive received a replica of Appalachian Power Park, commemorating the 10-year anniversary of the park’s opening.

The evening was a great success with West Virginia Power beating the Greensboro Grasshoppers 6-0.

Teen pageant winner promotes disability awareness

Zebulinne Haslacker, the newly crowned 2015 Miss West Virginia Teen Nationwide, is using her platform to educate West Virginia communities about disability issues.

The 15-year-old Grant County resident titled her pageant competition platform, “I’m just like you.”

Haslacker has a form of dyslexia and wants to use every opportunity to promote disability awareness. “I’m tired of people getting downgraded and being bullied just because they have a disability,” explained Haslacker. “I have been bullied, and it is so hurtful.”

Haslacker received the top honor for her division, girls ages 13 to 17, during the Miss West Virginia Nationwide pageant held on Sunday, July 13 at Hampshire County High School.

As Miss West Virginia Teen Nationwide, she will be traveling around the state, attending various fairs and festivals and discussing her platform to try and get others involved.

Last fall, Haslacker held a swap and shop fundraiser, where girls rented tables to swap or buy other girls’ gowns. She donated the proceeds to Potomac Highlands Guild, one of 13 comprehensive behavioral health centers in West Virginia. She and her mother, who works at Potomac Highlands Guild, also donated vegetables from their garden to clients of the center. She plans to hold other awareness activities in the future.

Haslacker is beginning her sophomore year at Petersburg High School, and she is already thinking about her future. After graduating, she would like to go to beauty school and business school. She dreams of opening a one-stop beauty shop, combining cosmetology and a gown shop in one location.

For now, this queen wants to encourage and support other students with disabilities at her school “so they know they’re not alone…They are just like you and me. They are amazing and beautiful people.”
Did you know?

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM), an annual campaign that raises awareness about disability employment issues and celebrates the many and varied contributions of America’s workers with disabilities. The 2014 theme is “Expect. Employ. Empower.”

NDEAM’s roots go back to 1945, when Congress enacted a law declaring the first week in October “National Employ the Physically Handicapped Week.” In 1962, the word “physically” was removed to acknowledge the employment needs and contributions of individuals with all types of disabilities. In 1988, Congress expanded the week to a month and changed the name to “National Disability Employment Awareness Month.”