Message from Director Donna Ashworth

It used to be common for me to hear people say that the Division of Rehabilitation Services was the “best kept secret in town.” Over the last several years, we have taken great strides to put ourselves out there and promote West Virginia’s vocational rehabilitation program.

Not only have we increased our marketing and outreach efforts, our vocational rehabilitation professionals are in West Virginia’s local communities raising awareness of the services and programs we have to offer.

I believe our numbers show that we are doing a commendable job. During the last fiscal year, we provided vocational rehabilitation services to 14,554 West Virginians with disabilities and helped 2,589 meet their individual employment goals.

These thousands of individuals with disabilities are served through our statewide Field Services Program. We have 30 field offices throughout West Virginia, as well as several itinerant locations. Our vocational rehabilitation counselors work out of these offices taking applications from those interested in services, carefully evaluating clients’ skills and interests and providing the services and comprehensive support each client needs to meet his or her employment goal.

Our mission of enabling and empowering people with disabilities to work and to live independently is fulfilled through our Field Services Program. Specialized programs and service areas support and assist with this accomplishment.

It’s very important that we continue in our efforts to promote the vocational rehabilitation program and to ensure that anyone who may need our services is aware of our multifaceted and diverse offerings.

This edition of the VocRehab Perspective focuses on providing an overview of West Virginia’s vocational rehabilitation program and summarizing our specialized programs and services that help our citizens with disabilities to put their abilities to work. I hope you find it to be informative and useful.
Vocational Rehabilitation

The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) operates the federal/state vocational rehabilitation program in West Virginia and is governed by the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.

But, what is vocational rehabilitation?

Vocational rehabilitation is a program of services that helps people with disabilities obtain the skills and other resources they need to get a job, keep a job and develop a lifetime career.

Who should apply for vocational rehabilitation?

If you have a disability and your disability causes you problems in preparing for, finding or keeping employment, then you should apply.

How does it work?

When you apply, a vocational rehabilitation counselor is assigned to work with you. Vocational rehabilitation counselors are trained to work with people with disabilities and are one of the most important people in your vocational rehabilitation program.

Who is eligible?

Eligibility is determined if:

- you have a physical, mental, learning or emotional disability; and
- you have a problem getting or keeping a job because of your disability; and
- you need and will benefit from vocational rehabilitation services to help you prepare for, get and/or keep a job.

What kind of vocational rehabilitation services are provided?

Vocational rehabilitation services are individualized to help address your unique barriers to employment and to help you achieve your employment goals. A wide range of services can be provided:

- Medical examinations (general physical, psychological or other specialist exams)
- Vocational evaluation of interests, skills and abilities for future work
- Vocational guidance
- Career counseling
- Physical or mental restoration services that could include mental health counseling, speech therapy, physical therapy, etc.
- Training – universities, colleges, technical schools, apprenticeship programs, on-the-job training, supported employment, etc.
- Rehabilitation devices – medical equipment necessary for employment (wheelchairs, prostheses, glasses, self-help devices, etc.)
- Rehabilitation engineering – assistance with jobsite modifications and training on the use of modified equipment
- Job placement
- Follow-up after employment to ensure job success

Basic Steps

Rehabilitation success

Employment

Services

Planning

Eligibility

Evaluation/assessment

Initial interview

Referral and application

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was the first civil rights legislation in the United States designed to protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination based on their disability status. The nondiscrimination requirements of the law apply to employers and organizations that receive federal financial assistance. This statute was intended to prevent intentional or unintentional discrimination based on a person’s disability.
Field Specialty Programs

Transition Program

DRS helps students with disabilities transition from high school to the world of work. Through its Transition Program, DRS can help students train for a job, continue their education to pursue a career goal or find a job directly after high school.

Transition services are a coordinated set of activities that involve DRS, students and their families and the school system. A vocational rehabilitation counselor works with students and their families to assess their needs and plan individualized services to meet their chosen vocational goal. Every high school in West Virginia has a vocational rehabilitation counselor assigned to provide transition services.

The Transition Program is designed to help students assess their skills, discover their interests and identify career and job options. Transition services, including career counseling, work-related training and education, worksite assessment and accommodations, driver evaluations, job coaching and more, provide the means to empower students to meet their work-related goals.

For more information about the Transition Program, contact Rehabilitation Program Specialist Angela Walker at 304-356-2375 or Angela.R.Walker@wv.gov.

Community Rehabilitation Programs

A Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) is a program that can directly provide, or facilitate the provision of, one or more vocational rehabilitation services to people with disabilities. DRS routinely purchases services from CRPs to help clients with significant disabilities achieve successful employment outcomes.

CRPs provide a variety of services which can include supported and direct employment, work skills and community-based assessment, job coach training, work adjustment and/or life skills training.

To better meet the needs of our clients, DRS works closely with the CRPs to evaluate service needs and to expand programs, such as vocational assessments, employment-readiness services and job placement.

For more information about the Community Rehabilitation Programs, contact Rehabilitation Services Manager Doug Auten at 304-356-2369 or Douglas.P.Auten@wv.gov.

Behavioral Health and Corrections Program

DRS established the Behavioral Health and Corrections Program in 2014 to better serve individuals with behavioral health conditions and people with disabilities who have criminal histories.

Employment is a critical part of the recovery process for people with behavioral health conditions. Additionally, formerly incarcerated individuals with disabilities are less likely to return to prison if they complete the vocational rehabilitation process and achieve employment.

Collaboration with other state agencies is a primary focus of the program in order to facilitate a coordinated approach to service delivery, engage in cross-training efforts and share existing resources. The program also provides high-quality technical assistance to DRS vocational rehabilitation counselors so they can more effectively serve clients.

For more information about the Behavioral Health and Corrections Program, contact Rehabilitation Program Specialist Rich Ward at 304-356-2104 or Richard.D.Ward@wv.gov.

“The DRS Field Specialty Programs are vitally important to the success of the vocational rehabilitation program. The rehabilitation professionals overseeing these programs stay abreast of current trends in these very specialized program areas so they can provide essential guidance, training and support to our vocational rehabilitation counselors who are out in the field interacting with our clients who benefit from these programs on a daily basis.”

Field Services Assistant Director Marijane Waldron
Field Specialty Programs

Sensory Specialty Programs

DRS has rehabilitation counselors who specialize in assisting clients with sensory-related disabilities.

**Blind and Visually Impaired**

Specially trained rehabilitation counselors help people with blindness and significant vision impairments to meet their vocational rehabilitation needs.

DRS offers individualized and intensive training to those clients who need to learn skills to effectively compensate and live independently with blindness or limited vision. This training may include orientation and mobility, computer literacy and access technology, Braille, home economics, activities of daily living, individual and group counseling and career development.

In addition to compensatory skills training, blind and visually impaired clients may receive job training, job placement or access technology to assist in training or to help them function on the job.

For more information about Blind and Visually Impaired Services, contact Rehabilitation Program Specialist Kevin Maynus at 304-256-6900 or Kevin.L.Maynus@wv.gov.

**Deaf and Hard of Hearing**

Specially trained rehabilitation counselors help meet the unique employment needs of people who are deaf or hard of hearing. These counselors understand deaf culture, as well as the needs of those who have lost their hearing later in life.

DRS rehabilitation counselors for the deaf work individually with clients to help them with their specific needs for employment. They can help identify accommodations necessary to participate in training, as well as help clients to prepare for job interviews and help them to request reasonable accommodations from an employer.

For clients with hearing loss, DRS can provide: vocational counseling and guidance, vocational evaluations and training services, audiological evaluations and assessments, interpreter services, telecommunications devices, assistive devices and hearing aids and assistive listening devices.

For more information about Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, contact Rehabilitation Services Manager Rachel Gill at 304-356-2080 or Rachel.L.Gill@wv.gov.

Employment Services Program

DRS employment specialists provide business owners and employers throughout the state critical business options and assistance in staffing and employee retention strategies, as well as education on disability-related issues, job accommodations and information about financial incentives for hiring individuals with disabilities.

Employment specialists are the link between DRS clients and employers. They specialize in providing instruction on résumé preparation, interviewing and job seeking skills, networking and local labor information to DRS clients as they prepare for and enter the workforce.

They are also trained to assist individuals who receive SSI and SSDI to understand the impact of employment on their earnings and benefits, including Medicaid and/or Medicare, and how to maximize the use of work incentives to allow earnings above the Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) limits.

For more information about the Employment Services Program, contact Rehabilitation Services Manager Stephanie Decker at 304-356-2366 or Stephanie.A.Decker@wv.gov.
Specialized Rehabilitation Services

Rehabilitation Engineering Services

Rehabilitation engineering uses theories of math, science and engineering to design, develop, adapt, apply and evaluate solutions to barriers met by people with disabilities. Rehabilitation engineers design and build devices and systems to meet a wide range of needs that can assist individuals with mobility, communication, hearing, vision and cognition. These tools help people with day-to-day activities and tasks related to employment, independent living and education.

Rehabilitation engineering may involve relatively simple observations of how workers perform tasks, and then making accommodations to eliminate further injuries and discomfort. Rehabilitation engineering might also require more involved design and fabrication of devices and/or equipment to assist an individual with a specific task or function.

For more information about Rehabilitation Engineering Services, contact Senior Technical Analyst Dale Castilla at 304-760-7159 or Dale.T.Castilla@wv.gov.

Environmental Modification Services

Environmental modifications involve some modification or change to an individual’s environment that will make them more independent. DRS’ environmental modifications team specializes in providing home modification services or job accommodation services that enable an individual to maintain independence and continue working.

After evaluating and assessing a client’s situation, a DRS rehabilitation engineer prepares a report that includes a blueprint or drawing of the proposed modification, a materials list and a timeframe for the proposed modification. The client’s DRS vocational rehabilitation counselor reviews the final report to determine if the service is necessary for the client to meet his or her vocational goal and if the costs are justifiable.

Common work for the environmental modifications team includes building ramps, bathroom modifications and some kitchen modifications, depending on the client’s work goal.

For more information about Environmental Modification Services, contact Environmental Modifications Supervisor Ryan Ware at 304-760-7159 or Ryan.T.Ware@wv.gov.

Driver Rehabilitation Services

Driver rehabilitation can help individuals with disabilities or age-related impairments maintain independent driving and transportation. This may be done through the use of specialized adaptive equipment and/or training.

DRS provides driver evaluations, which determine the most appropriate course of action for a client relative to the task of driving. A driving evaluation may yield a recommendation for driver education training as a new driver or retraining of an existing driver following an acquired disability or a recommendation to not operate a motor vehicle.

Vehicle modification evaluations are used to determine the types of vehicle modifications and adaptive equipment that will work best for a client based on the individual’s disabilities and capabilities.

Adaptive equipment for vehicles can range from very low-tech steering aids, such as a spinner knob to help the driver more easily maneuver the steering wheel, to more high-tech solutions that can include electronic controls to operate turn signals, windshield wipers, headlights and the parking brake.

For more information about Driver Rehabilitation Services, contact Rehabilitation Office Supervisor Cynthia Lokey at 304-760-7159 or Cynthia.A.Lokey@wv.gov.

“The DRS Rehabilitation Programs section oversees many specialized and unique service areas which focus on making different aspects of people’s lives more accessible and independent. Rehabilitation Technology Services center around job accommodations, home accessibility and driver rehabilitation to enable individuals to meet their employment goals. Blind and Visually Impaired Services enable people who are blind or visually impaired to develop, acquire or update skills that will help them reach their vocational goals by building good skills and promoting self-confidence and independence.”

Rehabilitation Programs Assistant Director Brenda Bates
Specialized Rehabilitation Services

Assistive Technology Services

Assistive technology is any item, piece of equipment, software or product system that is used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. Assistive technology includes products and services to help people who have difficulty speaking, typing, writing, remembering, pointing, seeing, hearing, learning, walking, etc. The purpose is to help people with disabilities function independently in the areas of work, home or school.

Assistive technology is widespread and available for a variety of disabilities. Individuals with visual impairments may use screen readers, refreshable Braille and speech recognition systems. Those with mobility impairments may use touch screens, keyboard filters including typing aids such as word prediction, alternative input devices, or basic wands, sticks, joy sticks, trackballs and even one-handed keyboards.

There are endless opportunities for assistive technology to meld with the workplace and to help employers make reasonable accommodations for their employees with disabilities.

For more information about Assistive Technology Services, contact Rehabilitation Office Supervisor Cynthia Lokey at (304) 760-7159 or Cynthia.A.Lokey@wv.gov.

Blind and Visually Impaired Services

Orientation and mobility services help clients who are blind or visually impaired to learn where they are, where they want to go and how to get there safely and independently. Techniques may focus on sensory awareness, spatial concepts, searching skills, independent movement, protective techniques and cane training, as well as techniques to utilize low vision and training with distance vision aids.

Other services for individuals who are blind or visually impaired may include assistive technology, Braille instruction and basic daily living skills training, including eating skills, identifying money, organizing clothing, house cleaning and home organization.

For more information about Blind and Visually Impaired Services, contact Senior Manager Carla Cleek at 304-760-7159 or Carla.B.Cleek@wv.gov.

Bioptic Driving Services

Bioptic driving is a specialized training program for drivers whose vision falls below the normal legal limits that allows them to qualify for a Class G driver’s license. The program educates participants on West Virginia driving laws and other skills necessary to operate a vehicle. Participants learn how to use a medically prescribed bioptic lens system, as well as critical object awareness, hazard perception and defensive driving skills.

Bioptic lens systems take the concept of bifocals to a whole new level. The wearer, using small telescopic lenses attached permanently to the upper part of corrective glasses, can quickly shift focus to the telescopic lens to decipher distant details, and then return just as quickly to scanning the road using their less distinct peripheral vision aided by the prescription carrier lens.

Candidates for the program must have a horizontal field of view of at least 120 degrees and a vertical field of view of at least 80 degrees in the better-functioning eye.

For more information about Bioptic Driving Services, contact Senior Manager Carla Cleek at 304-760-7159 or Carla.B.Cleek@wv.gov.

“For people without disabilities, technology makes things easier. For people with disabilities, technology makes things possible.”

Mary Pat Radabaugh
Director of IBM National Support Center for Persons with Disabilities
Other Specialized Programs

Randolph-Sheppard Program

The Randolph-Sheppard Program promotes economic opportunity and profitability through self-employment for people who are legally blind.

The program was founded under the Randolph-Sheppard Act, which gives individuals who are blind and in need of employment priority in the operation of vending facilities on federal property. State laws have expanded the program to include state and other governmental properties. DRS serves as the state licensing agency and recruits, trains, licenses and places individuals who are blind as managers of vending facilities located on federal, state and other governmental properties.

The Randolph-Sheppard Program provides training in food service management to eligible DRS clients who are legally blind. Randolph-Sheppard vendors are self-employed and must possess the aptitude and abilities required to function as a business owner and manager.

For more information about the Randolph-Sheppard Program, contact Rehabilitation Program Specialist Candice Ward at 304-760-7166 or Candice.K.Ward@wv.gov.

VISIONS Program

DRS administers and operates the Visually Impaired Seniors In-home Outreach and Networking Services (VISIONS) Program, through an independent living grant from the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration.

VISIONS serves individuals age 55 and older with permanent vision loss, providing individualized services such as low-tech adaptive aids and hand-held low vision aids, training in activities of daily living and referrals for other services such as Talking Book.

For more information about the VISIONS Program, contact Senior Manager Carla Cleek at 304-760-7159 or Carla.B.Cleek@wv.gov.

Second annual art contest and exhibition to showcase West Virginia artists with disabilities

DRS invites West Virginia artists with disabilities to enter the 2015 West Virginia Diversifying Perspectives Art Contest and Exhibition, which will feature original artwork created by people with disabilities.

To enter, you must be at least 18 years old, be a West Virginia resident and have a disability. There is no entry fee.

All entry materials and artwork may be submitted starting June 1 and must be received no later than June 30, 2015. Complete submission guidelines and an entry form are available at www.wvdrs.org.

A juried artist will select the winning entries based on criteria including originality, imagination, visual interest and skillful use of materials.

The awards include:

Grand Exhibitor – The winning artwork selected as the Grand Exhibitor will be incorporated into and prominently featured in a poster promoting National Disability Employment Awareness Month, which is celebrated annually in October. The poster will be distributed to businesses throughout West Virginia and will include an image of the winning artwork, a biographical statement about the artist and his or her disability, a photograph of the artist and the annual National Disability Employment Awareness Month theme established by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy.

DRS will also purchase the artwork selected as the Grand Exhibitor (at a maximum cost of $1,000).

Awards of Excellence – Up to three $100 awards. These are not purchase awards.

The 2015 exhibition will open Thursday, Sept. 3, at the Culture Center in Charleston and will remain on display through Nov. 7, 2015.
Did you know?

The public rehabilitation program in America can trace its roots back to World War I. During that war, modern medicine allowed more injured soldiers to survive and come home with significant disabilities than ever before. But they couldn’t go back to their old jobs.

The Soldiers Rehabilitation Act of 1918 introduced a new concept in disability support - not just money to live on, but training for the injured veterans as preparation for new jobs matching their “new” abilities.

A farmer who lost a leg fighting in France might be trained in drafting. A factory worker with lungs burned by chlorine gas might become a pharmacist. This idea was popular with the American people.

Through the Smith-Fess Act, Congress expanded the veteran’s program in 1920 to include anyone with a physical disability, not just veterans.

This was the beginning of the public vocational rehabilitation program.