

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES
REHABILITATIVE SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM
RSA-IM-99-23
DATE: May 3, 1999

TO : STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCIES (GENERAL)
STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCIES (BLIND)
PROTECTION & ADVOCACY OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS
CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS
CHOICE DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS
NATIONAL FACILITIES COALITION
REGIONAL REHABILITATION CONTINUING EDUCATION PROGRAMS
AMERICAN INDIAN VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAMS
RSA SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

SUBJECT: An Evaluation of Choice Demonstration Projects, Final Report

CONTENT: Attached is a copy of the Final Report on the *Evaluation of the Choice Demonstration Projects*, an evaluation conducted by InfoUse under contract to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (U.S. Department of Education). Seven demonstration projects were awarded to: Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (AR); Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VT); Washington Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (WA); Berkeley Center for Independent Living (BCIL); Southwest Business, Industry and Rehabilitation Association (SWBIRA); The Development Team, Incorporated (TDTI); and United Cerebral Palsy Associations, Inc. (UCPA). Authorized by PL 102-569, Section 802(g)(7)), the evaluation addresses "the services provided, clients served, client outcomes obtained, implementation issues addressed, the cost effectiveness of the project, and the effects of increased choice on clients and service providers" in the demonstration projects. Three documents are available from the evaluation: the *Final Report*, the *Executive Summary* (which is bound with the *Final Report*, and an *Operations Manual*.

InfoUse conducted multiple visits to each project site, interviewed project managers and staff, reviewed project records, extracted data from consumer records, and surveyed consumers from each project.

The *Final Report* describes the Choice model implemented by each project. It details the promising practices that represent major components of the choice models regarding: **project entry** (Expedited Eligibility, VT, Group Orientation,

BCIL), **empowerment training** (Go for the Gold, AR; Empowerment Seminars, BCIL; Empowerment Workshops, WA; Employability Assessment Workshop, SWBIRA), **helpers** (Consumer Connectors, AR; Rehabilitation Team, WA; Employment Advisors, UCPA), **plan process and development** (Facilitated Peer Group, TDTI; Self-Employment and Peer Lending, VT), **payment systems** (Imprest Cash, VT; Open Provider Payment System, BCIL; Personal Accounts, UCPA), and a **Consumer's Counselor Performance Review**, VT.

The study examined patterns of the types of services and providers used by participants and the impact of choice on providers of purchased services. Project designs had a significant impact on the types of services and service providers used by participants. Some projects did not develop vendor lists while other projects sought out new providers. Generally, many providers who dealt with Choice participants were not aware that these individuals were involved in the projects at all. Also, Choice consumers, in some cases, purchased goods on the open market at significantly less cost than if they had purchased the same items using State-negotiated price lists.

The Choice project consumers expressed high levels of satisfaction with their degree of involvement in decision making during the rehabilitation process. Generally, Choice project consumers' levels of satisfaction were similar to the levels of satisfaction expressed by State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency consumers.

Average annual cost per participant in the projects was significantly higher than the average participant cost for VR agencies. However, added costs frequently were incurred in providing the additional services and supports useful in expanding consumer choice (e.g., helpers, empowerment training, extensive consumer planning processes). Creating prototypes of new services tends to increase costs.

Comparisons of employment outcomes between the VR agencies in choice projects were inconclusive due to differences in the way outcome measures were taken.

The *Final Report* recommends the adoption of expedited eligibility, implementation of imprest cash, training consumers in new service models that enhance consumer choice, exploring the impact of alternative methods of purchasing services, experimenting with setting limits on service budgets, conducting research on the relationship between consumer choice and employment outcomes, and utilizing State Innovation and Expansion funds to implement the various promising practices for enhancing consumer choice. RSA is planning to conduct a national dissemination conference to review the study's findings and recommendations and encourage State VR agencies to adopt those recommendations that are particularly useful.

The *Operations Manual* is a companion to the Final Report. Each Choice demonstration project pioneered specific practices that can teach a great deal about implementing Choice. The Manual presents sixteen representative promising practices that emerged from the projects as candidates for replication in various contexts. The descriptions of promising practices include original forms, policies, and other implementation materials intended to help VR agencies and other organizations develop similar practices.

All three documents are available and are now posted on InfoUse's web site (<http://www.infouse.com>). Both the Executive Summary and Operations Manual are also available as ASCII text files. These files may be viewed over the Internet and saved as a text file using different word processing software. Users of "Screen Reader" software may use these files to access the documents.

If you have any questions concerning the Executive Summary or the Final Report, please call Dr. Harold Kay, Director of Evaluation, Rehabilitation Services Administration at (202) 205-9883.

Fredric K. Schroeder
Commissioner

Attachment

CC: NATIONAL COUNCIL ON INDEPENDENT LIVING
COUNCIL OF STATE ADMINISTRATORS OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY SYSTEMS