

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES
REHABILITATION SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
WASHINGTON, DC 20202

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM
RSA-IM-02-09
DATE: January 8, 2002

ADDRESSEES: STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCIES (GENERAL)
STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCIES (BLIND)
STATE REHABILITATION COUNCILS
CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS
PROTECTION & ADVOCACY OF INDIVIDUAL RIGHTS PROGRAMS
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PROGRAMS
AMERICAN INDIAN VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICE
PROGRAMS
RSA SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

SUBJECT: The General Accounting Office (GAO) release of a report titled: "Welfare Reform: More Coordinated Federal Effort Could Help States and Localities Move TANF Recipients With Impairments Toward Employment."

CONTENT: The purpose of this Information Memorandum (IM) is to provide State VR agencies and their constituencies with a summary of a GAO report released on October 31, 2001, which outlines current understanding of how local Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) offices address the needs of recipients with impairments. While the report is lengthy and therefore not included with the IM, it can be accessed via the web address www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-02-37.

The GAO report highlights some of the challenges facing local TANF programs as they attempt to accurately identify the numbers of recipients with impairments currently on TANF caseloads, the types of impairments encountered, and how best to provide employment services to recipients with impairments.

Research cited in the report indicates that, according to 1999 Census Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP) data, a significant percentage (38%) of TANF recipients reported having a physical or mental impairment affecting

their ability to work. This percentage does not include those individuals unable or unwilling to self-identify impairments.

The GAO also found that, among counties that screen TANF recipients for impairments, the screening, in most cases, amounts to only asking the recipient in question to self-identify. Once an impairment is confirmed, in many cases, there is no guarantee that those individuals determined to have an impairment receive additional services to assist them in obtaining employment. For those localities that do provide services, VR was identified as a linkage source for service provision.

GAO staff identified several localities where services were effectively being provided to recipients with impairments. The strategies employed by programs identified as “effective” included development of standardized diagnostic tools and/or a team approach to case management. Caseworkers at the identified sites agreed that a tailored approach to service provision for each recipient was key to that individual’s success.

Finally, the report states that the Department of Health and Human Services should do more to provide technical assistance to TANF programs, particularly at the local level, regarding service provision to recipients with impairments. Citing a joint letter sent to TANF and VR programs encouraging collaboration, among other efforts, the report identifies areas where partnership is already at work, but states that more is needed in order to ensure that TANF is adequately serving this significant portion of its recipients.

Again, the full report can be accessed at:

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-02-37

If you have difficulty downloading it or have any questions or comments, please contact Ms. Jenn Rigger, RSA’s Central Office Employment Specialist, at (202) 260-2179, or via E-mail at jenn.rigger@ed.gov.

Joanne M. Wilson
Commissioner

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

NATIONAL REHABILITATION FACILITIES COALITION