

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

INFORMATION MEMORANDUM
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TO: STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCIES (GENERAL)
STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCIES (BLIND)
STATE REHABILITATION COUNCILS
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RSA SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

SUBJECT: Findings and Implications of the First and Second Final Reports of the
Longitudinal Study of the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services
Program

CONTENT: The *Longitudinal Study* followed 8,500 VR consumers at 37 locations for
at least three years for the purpose of identifying: 1) the types of
individuals served; 2) types of services provided; 3) environments in
which the services were provided; and 4) short-term and long-term
economic and non-economic outcomes of the VR program. The study's
sample acquisition and data collection activities began in January 1995
and were completed in January, 2000, with sample acquisition occurring
over a two-year period with each of the study's 8,500 participants tracked
for three years.

Presented below are some key findings that you might find useful.

**Consumer Characteristics and Retention/Success in the VR Services
Program**

Findings from the Longitudinal Study indicate that the VR program does
not select for services only those individuals who are most likely to
achieve an employment outcome. Individuals who are served are similar
to those who are not served, indicating that the VR program does not
achieve its current performance level by rejecting individuals with more
significant levels of disability. NOTE: In the logistic regression analyses
for acceptance for VR services and receipt of VR services that tested the
role of consumer characteristics in determining if consumers remained or

left the VR program, the R-square values for predicting acceptance or receipt of services were only .0695 and .0241 respectively out of a possible prediction value of 1.0.

- Individuals were more likely to become eligible for services, receive services, and obtain employment if they had higher self-esteem.
Implications: Screening for low self-esteem may be indicated in some instances, and appropriate interventions to enhance self-esteem, including mentoring, adjustment programs, consumer empowerment opportunities, etc. might be incorporated in the plan to assist individuals to enter, persevere, and succeed in the rehabilitation process and eventual employment.
- Individuals with higher gross motor function and higher personal care function were more likely to receive services, enter employment, and enter competitive employment.
Implications: Individuals with lower gross motor and personal care function might benefit from early identification and receipt of appropriate services, particularly rehabilitation technology services.
- Individuals with better knowledge of specific jobs and better work-related information gathering skills were more likely to become eligible for VR services, to receive VR services, to enter employment, and to enter competitive employment.
Implications: Screening for job knowledge and information gathering skills might be useful to identify those consumers who may need work-oriented interventions or services that enhance work-knowledge and information gathering skills (i.e. mentoring, transition to work programs, internships, referral to consumer organizations that have job information programs, etc.) that will assist those consumers to enter and successfully complete the rehabilitation process and obtain employment.
- Individuals were less likely to obtain services, employment and competitive employment if they had never worked.
Implications: This suggests that special attention should be provided to individuals with no work history including structured, compensated work experiences that introduce them gradually to the world of work.
- Individuals receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) were more likely to be deemed eligible for services. However, individuals receiving SSI or Social Security Disability Insurance

(SSDI) and other benefits were less likely to receive services, obtain employment or obtain competitive employment.

Implications: Benefits counseling should be provided to all applicants and recipients of SSI/DI including use of the Ticket and new provisions for preserving or regaining medical/financial benefits. Where possible, individuals should be exposed to peers with disabilities who have successfully made the transition from SSI/DI benefits to successful employment.

Consumer Satisfaction and Empowerment

Overall, consumers reported satisfaction with services, active involvement in decision-making and control in the vocational rehabilitation process.

- Eighty-one percent of consumers believed that they had sufficient choice in the selection of a vocational goal.
- Seventy-nine percent of consumers were very satisfied or mostly satisfied with the services they received.
- Eighty-three percent of consumers indicated they were very satisfied or mostly satisfied with available service providers.
- In selecting services, consumers reported that they selected their services one-fifth of the time, and the consumer and counselor decided together more than two-thirds of the time.
- One-half of consumers reported being in charge of decisions to a great extent, and an additional 41 percent reported being in charge of decisions to some extent.

Consumer-Counselor Relationship

The quality of the consumer-counselor relationship was found to be a key variable leading to an employment outcome, competitive employment, and higher earnings. Consumers reported satisfaction with their involvement in activities related to planning and delivery of services.

- Nearly three-fourths of consumers reported that their counselor always showed sufficient concern for their needs, and over three-fourths reported that their counselor was willing to listen to their ideas and suggestions.
- Eighty-one percent of the consumers reported that their counselor provided adequate information regarding available services and service providers when their Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) was developed.

- Nearly three-fourths of the consumers were very satisfied or mostly satisfied with the VR counselor's effort to help him/her work toward obtaining employment.
- A relatively small percentage of consumers, around 10 percent, were consistently dissatisfied with their interactions with their counselor, with their counselor's efforts and concern, and with their control over their VR services.

Relationship between VR and Primary Disability

Primary disability was the most important factor that affected the specific services individuals received from VR, both in terms of the types of services persons received and in terms of the average number of services they received. Even among specific primary disability groups, there was wide variability in the number of services received, supporting the hypothesis that the VR program individualizes services to meet consumers' needs. Overall, service patterns differ by disability and are complex.

- Consumers with mental illness received a greater number of different services than did any other group, followed by consumers with traumatic brain injury and those with learning disabilities.
- Consumers with vision or hearing impairments typically received assessment services and subsequent assistive devices as well as specifically targeted services as opposed to a greater number of different services.
- Persons with mental retardation received fewer assessment services than other consumers, and a relatively larger number of employment development services such as supported employment, work adjustment, job development, and job placement.

Relationship Between Services and Outcomes

VR services contributed quite significantly to consumers' employment outcomes.

- Services found to be important for both competitive and non-competitive employment outcomes included quality of the consumer/counselor relationship, IPE modification, job development, job placement, and on-the-job-training.
- Post-secondary education services—business or vocational training and four-year college or university—were important for competitive employment.

Employment Outcomes, Benefits and Reduction in Dependency

On all measures of economic outcomes, VR consumers who achieved a competitive employment outcome fared better than did those who achieved a non-competitive employment outcome and persons who exited without an employment outcome.

- At the third annual follow-up: Seventy-eight percent of persons exiting into competitive employment were still working as opposed to 70% of those exiting into non-competitive employment, 37% of those who received services but exited VR without an employment outcome, and 40% of those who were eligible but dropped out before receiving VR services.
- Individuals obtaining competitive employment earned an average of \$7.63 when they exited the VR program. Three years later, they averaged \$10.06.
- Of individuals obtaining competitive employment, 32% earned more than 200% of the federal poverty level at exit from the VR program; three years later, 46% were at 200% of the federal poverty level (the rate for the general population is 62%).
- Among individuals who obtained any type of employment outcome with earnings, 32% received health benefits from their employers at exit from VR. Three years later the percentage rose to 50% (the figure for all individuals in the country including the non-disabled is approximately 52%). Among those with competitive employment outcomes the percentage rose from 36% to 58% over three years.
- Among individuals obtaining a competitive employment outcome, 39% reported they received some form of benefit or transfer payments at entry into VR; whereas, three years after their case files were closed, 26% reported they still received some form of benefit or transfer payment.

Non-economic Outcomes

Individuals achieving both competitive and non-competitive employment outcomes experienced gains in self-confidence, reductions in perceived limitations or potential imposed by disability or health problems, and gains in learning how to develop goals and plans. Those with competitive employment outcomes fared best.

- Among persons achieving competitive employment, 57% at entry to the study and 42% at three years following exit from the VR program stated that disability or health problems prevented or

limited them from reaching their full potential; whereas, among non-competitive employment outcomes, the decline was from 56% to 51%.

- Eighty-seven percent of VR consumers with either a competitive or non-competitive employment outcome stated that VR helped them a great deal or somewhat to experience gains in self-confidence.
- In terms of experiencing gains in learning how to develop goals and plans, 83% of VR consumers with a competitive employment outcome stated that VR helped them a great deal or somewhat; 74% of consumers with non-competitive employment outcomes responded similarly.

Public Use Datasets

Public use datasets of all Longitudinal Study data have been provided to the Disability Research Institute (DRI), University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Cornell University Research and Training Center. The URL for DRI is: <http://compaq.ncsa.uiuc.edu:8080/vrsp/do/query/types>. The URL for Cornell is: <http://www.lsvrsp.org>.

If you have any questions concerning this Information Memorandum, please contact Dr. Harold Kay, Director of Evaluation at 202/205-9883.

Joanne Wilson
Commissioner

Attachment

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