

**GETTING THE  
MOST OUT OF  
VR**



**VOCATIONAL  
REHABILITATION**

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# Getting the Most out of Vocational Rehabilitation

Like most young adults, you may want to explore which type of job or career is of most interest, take some educational classes, or pursue an on-the-job training program. As we all know, it can be very expensive to pay for a training program, books, equipment, tools, and transportation to get into this type of learning experience.

Or maybe you have finished your training or education and want a job. You may want help locating employers who are currently hiring, writing a resume, preparing for interviews, and negotiating with an employer for a specialized work schedule or the supports you will need to learn the job. Once you have landed a job, an employer may expect you to supply

your own equipment or tools on the first day which can also be expensive.

Or perhaps you have some money in the bank or a part-time entry level job. Or have applied for Pell grants, state grants, and/or educational loans through the federal FAFSA application process to pay for school. Or your family may be trying to help pay for tools, equipment, or transportation. In any of these situations, Vocational Rehabilitation is an additional resource to you as well.

## Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

Your state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program is an important resource for

people with disabilities. VR counselors are available to assist young adults with physical, emotional or mental health challenges to successfully pursue their job or career goals.

The purpose of this Tip Sheet is to optimize your VR experience. Your counselor wants to see you succeed and will provide information and support to assist you in exercising informed choice throughout the rehabilitation process as you work towards your employment goal.

# Vocational Rehabilitation

## What is Vocational Rehabilitation?

VR is paid for by the federal government and you might be eligible if you apply. It is available in every state to help people with disabilities prepare for and obtain jobs. In big cities there may be several VR offices, whereas in rural areas there may only be one office that serves many counties. You can find out more about the VR offices in your state by searching online using the name of your state followed by “vocational rehabilitation” (Example: “Oregon vocational rehabilitation”). The federal

website URL for finding the VR program in your state is: [http://wdcrobcolp01.ed.gov/Programs/EROD/org\\_list.cfm?category\\_cd=SVR](http://wdcrobcolp01.ed.gov/Programs/EROD/org_list.cfm?category_cd=SVR)

## What Kind of Services Can You Get from VR?

VR may arrange for:

1. Career exploration experiences;
2. Education and training to include help in building a plan to pay for tuition, books, and fees to reach your career goal;

# Kristy's Story

*My name is Kristy and I have been a Vocational Rehabilitation, or VR, consumer for about a year and a half. I love animals and thought that a job working with them might be a good match for me. My VR counselor paid an agency to do a work assessment with me at a dog grooming company. I really liked the work, but I realized that to be successful as a groomer you have to work very, very fast...*

3. Assistive technology software or PDAs, or other assistive devices (if needed);
4. Tools, equipment, and uniforms for participation in training or on a job;
5. Transportation to get to work;
6. Exploring an option for starting a small business.

VR services are customized to adapt to each person's unique circumstances. Decisions are made using "informed choice" by weighing out the pros and cons in making a fully-informed choice. VR may ask you to participate in a self-assessment to identify your own strengths and interests. VR's goal is to help you obtain or advance in a job or career.

## Are You Eligible to Get Vocational Rehabilitation Services?

You may be eligible to receive VR services if:

1. You have a disability\*;
2. Your disability creates difficulties obtaining or being successful in a job;
3. You are willing to go to work.

Your VR program counselor will help you determine if you're eligible.

*\*Keep in mind that many people have disabilities and may qualify. For example, if you have been in IEP meetings at school, you may qualify as having a disability.*



# Meeting with Your VR Counselor

The first step toward obtaining VR services is to submit an application at a VR office or a Work Source Center. You may be scheduled to attend a group or individual orientation to learn more about how VR works.

The next step will be to meet with a counselor to determine your actual eligibility for services. Your counselor will ask for your help in sharing the name(s) of your doctor, medical providers, or high school so that VR can help you locate documentation of your disability. If you

have copies of your record(s), please bring what you think might be useful to your first meeting with a new counselor. If you have not been formally diagnosed with a disability or these diagnoses are not recent, the VR counselor may schedule an assessment to determine the nature of your disability and whether you are eligible for services.

## Once You Are Eligible for Services

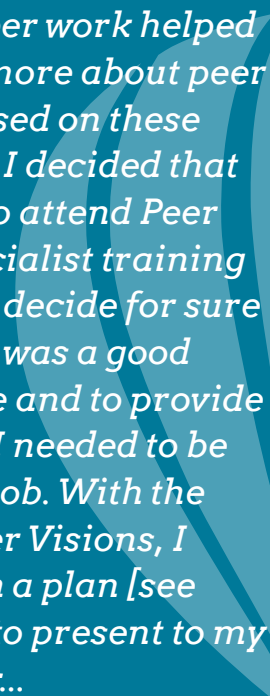
You and your counselor will work together to decide what job or career is



most appealing and how best to pursue finding employment. The counselor will ask about your various interests and activities that you enjoy to be able to suggest jobs or careers that pique your enthusiasm. Your VR counselor can help you interview people working in the job or occupational field of interest or set up short-term work experiences to explore if this is the type of job you will find stimulating.

Once you have determined the type

*...I knew that I really liked helping other people in the same way that I had gotten help as a teenager and young adult with mental health challenges. I also recognized that I had a gift for helping people who are upset and feeling overwhelmed. Career Visions introduced me to a career field, Peer Support, that I didn't know existed. I learned a little about this type of job by looking at job openings on the web. Then Career Visions taught me how to ask for informational interviews. Following what I learned, I conducted an interview with a professional Peer Support Specialist at a company where I later volunteered...*



*...The volunteer work helped me to learn more about peer supports. Based on these experiences, I decided that I would like to attend Peer Support Specialist training to help me to decide for sure if this career was a good match for me and to provide the training I needed to be able to get a job. With the help of Career Visions, I came up with a plan [see pages 18-19] to present to my VR counselor...*

of job or career you wish to pursue, your VR counselor will write an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) to include the services and supports to achieve your goal. This plan serves as a “road map” to your employment success.

## Once You Have a Job

The VR counselor will be in touch with you periodically during the first 3 months of a new job to ensure that everything is going well. After the first 3 months, if you are satisfied with your new employer, VR will close your case. You may always contact VR after your case is closed if new situations arise and you wish to speak with a VR counselor.

*Kristy enjoyed helping people and giving advice.*



# Your Rights and Responsibilities

## What Are Your Basic Rights?

You have the right to appeal or challenge decisions that you feel are not in your best interest. The Client Assistance Program (CAP) can help you if you have applied to VR or are already a client. To find CAP in your state, go to <http://www.icdri.org/legal/CAP.htm>. You may feel uncomfortable or nervous to speak up, but it is important for everyone that you feel comfortable and able to make the choices which will benefit you in the long run.

## And What About Your Responsibilities?

- \* Organize and make your appointments.
- \* If you need to cancel, contact your counselor ASAP.
- \* Share your opinions and preferences when exploring opportunities.
- \* If you say you are going to do something, honor your commitments.
- \* Classes or training programs are great learning experiences so ask for help if

your learning style is more auditory or visual to optimize your personal growth.

- \* If you and your VR counselor select a job developer to help you find a job, meet with the job developer regularly and be an active partner in the process.





*...The plan included explaining the steps that I had taken to decide that a Peer Support Specialist job was a good match for me. The plan also detailed how I wanted VR to help me in order to pursue this type of job. I asked my counselor to cover the \$500 cost for a 5-day Peer Support Specialist training and then to hire a job developer who would help me to get a job if the training went well. My VR counselor was so impressed with all of the work that I had done to come up with the plan that she agreed to it.*

*I had to get up much earlier than I was used to in order to make it to the all-day training. It was also hard for*

*me to be in a small room with a lot of people all day. I asked my instructor for some accommodations, including sitting close to the door and taking short breaks when I started to feel anxious. My final project was a video and presentation about how peers can support each other. My instructors were so impressed with how I handled myself during the training that they offered me a job giving telephone peer support. I took the job and am now working part-time. Of course, when I told my VR counselor about this, she was thrilled. ■*

# Kristy's Career Planning Summary for Vocat

1

I completed a work assessment at a dog grooming business. I liked it, but it was determined that I was not fast enough to be competitive.

2

With assistance from the Career Visions Project I completed a career planning self-evaluation during which I wrote down my strengths, interests, and work preferences.

3

*Career Planning Activities...*



# ional Rehabilitation

Through self-evaluation I identified people-helping as a job area that I wanted to explore. I researched a number of these types of jobs through the Oregon Labor Market Information Systems (OLMIS) website, including jobs supporting people with disabilities. Through this research I learned about a growing job area in Oregon called Peer Support Specialist. I then conducted an informational interview with staff at the Mental Health America of Oregon (MHAO) organization in Portland.

4

I asked the MHAO staff if I could do some volunteer work with them. Soon I will begin working with their Young Adult Outreach Project Coordinator to distribute information about the Affordable Care Act.

## ...Peer Support Specialists Job Outlook...

1

Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS) has made a commitment to increasing the number of peers who are employed by organizations that serve people with mental health conditions such as community mental health agencies as well as other agencies where these individuals frequently seek assistance, including emergency rooms. Oregon DHS has developed standards for individuals to be trained and certified in peer supports.

2

I have conducted several searches on Craigslist and other job search websites and found a number of Peer Support Specialist openings in the Greater Portland Area.

1

I would like to attend a Peer Support Specialist training. MHAO recommended the Intentional Peer Support Training (IPS). An IPS training will be held in Portland March 24-28. The cost is \$500 for the training. The registration deadline was March 17, but the IPS Director indicated that she will hold one slot open for me.

2

I will begin and continue to volunteer with MHAO in the area of peer supports.

3

I would like assistance from a job developer to obtain a Peer Support Specialist job and/or a job working at a group home or providing one-to-one supports to people with mental health and/or developmental disabilities.

*...Next Steps*

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