

Appendix 14-A

Best Practices

Job Search Workshop

Denver Regional Office
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Division
Contact Person: Mr. Gregory Bittle
Telephone Number: (303) 914-5550

In late 1999, a comprehensive Job Seeking Skills (JSS) one-day workshop was developed specifically for Colorado/Wyoming Chapter 31 program participants. The following organizations collaborated to produce this effective practice:

- Denver/Cheyenne VR&E
- US Dept. of Labor (DOL), Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS)
- State of Colorado Veterans
- State of Colorado, Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP)

Here is what resulted from the initial discussion:

- A Memorandum of Understanding was developed between DOL-VETS and VA-VRE.
- A one-day, six-hour JSS workshop, done monthly in Denver and Colorado Springs, CO, was developed and initiated.
- A PowerPoint slide presentation was developed.
- A 6-page workbook used during the JSS workshop by participants was developed and produced.
- A JSS workshop was developed and is now conducted by Denver VR&E Employment Specialist and State of Colorado DVOPS.
- A requirement that all Chapter 31 program participants attend the JSS prior to receiving the two-month employment adjustment allowance (usually around \$1000).

Post JSS customer satisfaction surveys have been very positive (95% + ratings) and this “free” workshop allowed Denver/Cheyenne VR&E to reduce employment services contract costs by over \$200,000/year. Some areas covered during the JSS seminar:

- **Job Search** – considerations, planning, execution, how to identify companies and resources, networking
- **Resumes** – formats, examples, purpose, cover letters, job applications, federal applications, KSA’s (knowledge, skills and abilities)
- **Interviewing** – types, first impressions, techniques, questions and answers, role playing
- **Reference Information Documents** – contacts, phone numbers, and Websites

Appendix 14-B Best Practices Model Partnership VHA and VBA Vocational Rehabilitation Program

James A. Haley VA Medical Center, Tampa, FL
Contact Person: Ms. Linda McGann
Telephone Number: (813) 972-2000, Extension 6092

St. Petersburg Regional Office
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Division
Contact Person: Ms. Ruth Fanning
Telephone Number: (727) 319-7902

The document describes the current collaborative process and mechanism for providing employment and/or independent living services to veterans and active duty military members under the Chapter 31 benefit. The individuals receiving these services are the shared clients of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program at the James A. Haley Veterans' Hospital (hereafter referred to as the Tampa VA) and the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment section of the St. Petersburg Regional Office.

The practice model has evolved over the last 20+ years and is the product of ongoing collaborative efforts, shared strategic planning, and continuous interaction between the vocational rehabilitation providers on the hospital side and the staff of the VR&E section at St. Petersburg. It should be noted that the VR program at the Tampa VA serves all categories of veterans, service-connected, non-service connected, and active duty members, as opposed to the VR&E program, which serves only the service-connected population and active duty members who have been discharged or are waiting medical retirement and have been awarded a memorandum rating by VBA.

It is believed that the success of this model is attributable to a large extent to the fact that the staff at Tampa VA has achieved a high level of specialization in serving individuals who have sustained severe, often catastrophic injuries such as traumatic brain injury, spinal cord injury, amputation, and others. Likewise the VR&E section has sought to achieve counselor and contractor specialization in managing this type of complex injury. Fluctuating staffing patterns and needs in the VR&E section have resulted in recent changes in the assignment of cases to counselors and contractors of the St. Petersburg regional office. The current model of collaboration was developed specifically for the brain injury population, which has been prioritized for services for some 10+ years. The model now generalizes to all types of severe disability, and forms the framework for managing all such clients, particularly those who need independent living services.

Identification of clients eligible to apply for Chapter 31 services/intake process

The dedicated Voc Rehab Specialist for that program assesses all individuals admitted to the acute brain injury rehabilitation program. If the client is deemed eligible to apply

for Voc Rehab services under Chapter 31, the VRS assists client or family member in completing application and forwarding to the St. Petersburg office with relevant medical information. VR&E section is notified by telephone of forthcoming application and entitlement and feasibility determination. Chapter 31 applications are also completed for appropriate individuals with brain injury who are admitted to non-acute beds or who present to Voc Rehab at Tampa VA as outpatients at any point in the continuum of recovery.

All individuals admitted to the spinal cord injury/dysfunction acute rehabilitation bed service are given an orientation to employment and independent living services available to them. Consults for individual voc rehab assessment are generated by the treatment team on an as needed basis. The Chapter 31 application process is facilitated by either the VRS at the Tampa VA or the VBA liaison out-stationed there and is then handled similarly to the above. Applications for individuals with spinal cord injury now receive the same prioritization as those for individuals with brain injury. The Voc Rehab Specialist at Tampa also assists in the Chapter 31 application process for individuals in the post-acute phases of recovery whenever the treatment team or OP provider generates a consult to them.

All patients admitted to the inpatient Chronic Pain Rehabilitation Program are screened by the Voc Rehab staff at Tampa; appropriate individuals are assisted with the Chapter 31 application process.

All clients in the outpatient Alcohol and Drug Abuse Treatment Program are provided group education by the Voc Rehab staff at Tampa regarding the vocational services available to them. Individual attention is provided on the basis of a consult generated by the treatment team. Clients in need of Chapter 31 services – often in pain – are assisted with the application process.

Appropriate individuals not involved in one of the above treatment programs are educated to the Chapter 31 benefit and assisted with the application process in response to consults generated by inpatient or outpatient providers or in response to a need identified during a walk-in assessment.

In summary, all clients seen by the Voc Rehab Program at the Tampa VA are assisted in applying for Voc Rehab under Chapter 31 and provided education in the determination process if they are eligible to apply and present with a need for either employment or independent living services. If independent living needs are identified or anticipated and the individual is hospitalized in one of the rehabilitation programs at the Tampa VA, the Voc Rehab Specialist provides liaison between the treatment team and the VR&E counselor or contractor who is assigned to the case by the St. Petersburg Regional Office. Individual members of the team that is treating the client are asked to provide recommendations for ongoing therapy in a post-acute or community based setting. The recommendations are faxed to the VR&E counselor or contractor and form the basis for developing the independent living plan. This may be done during the acute rehabilitation admission, during a post-acute follow-up admission, or during an admission requested by the Voc Rehab Specialist at any point in the continuum.

Counselor/contractor assignment and plan development

Once received by the St. Petersburg Regional Office, the application/client is assigned to a VR&E counselor or contractor. The VR&E provider then makes entitlement and feasibility determination and plan development is initiated. Whenever possible, the VR&E contractor assigned to the case has face-to-face contact with the Chapter 31 applicant or a responsible party during their inpatient stay in one of the Tampa VA rehabilitation programs. These face-to-face meetings are coordinated by either the Voc Rehab Specialist or the Social Worker at Tampa VA, both in terms of time and location. Client/family input is obtained from the onset of plan development and continues after the individual returns to his or her discharge environment.

Requests for medical services for Chapter 31 clients

All requests for medical services needed by individuals during the Chapter 31 entitlement and feasibility determination or during the delivery of Chapter 31 services are facilitated by the Voc Rehab Specialist at Tampa VA. All requests are forwarded to Voc Rehab at Tampa, where they are logged in, triaged as needed, then routed to the appropriate clinic or provider. The VRS at the Tampa VA provides ongoing education to medical center providers regarding prioritization of these requests and the importance of documenting interventions appropriately. The paper document on which these requests are made is currently problematic, in that providers at Tampa VA have been directed by hospital administration to decline all paper consults/requests for services. It is unclear at this time how the Voc Rehab Specialist's role in this process will change if the process for requesting medical services becomes automated (electronic), as has been suggested will occur at the national level.

Vocational evaluations for individuals in need of employment services

To the extent that staffing in the Tampa Voc Rehab Program permits, Vocational Evaluations are conducted for Chapter 31 clients seeking employment services. At the request of a VR&E counselor or contractor, these individuals may be provided a battery of tests/assessments (aptitude, interest, IQ, transferability of skills, situational assessment via the non-paid work experience or a compensated work therapy placement, and others).

Cross-Training

The staff of the Tampa VA Voc Rehab Program and the staff of the St. Petersburg VR&E are frequently involved in cross-training programs. This is accomplished in various forums: workshops, conferences, teleconferences, and specialized training opportunities for the contractors. These cross-training experiences frequently result in process improvements to the benefit of both sides and improved efficiency in serving our shared clients.

Stakeholder Input/Collaborative Strategic Planning

The VR&E Program at the St. Petersburg Regional Office and its entire staff are viewed as primary stakeholders of the Voc Rehab Program at the Tampa VA. Our missions overlap in the provision of Voc Rehab services to that population of Veterans/active duty members who are eligible to apply for the Chapter 31 benefit and are subsequently found entitled and feasible for an employment or independent living plan. For that population of veterans/active duty members, the outcome measures utilized by the Voc Rehab Program at Tampa are interdependent on the processes and outcomes utilized

by the VR&E Program at St. Petersburg. Our client and family satisfaction instrument frequently reveals issues, concerns, and feedback that crosses both of the programs. A stakeholder satisfaction survey instrument is utilized to obtain feedback from the counselors and contractors in the VR&E section at St. Petersburg regarding the services that we provide to them. The effectiveness measure used by the VR program at Tampa (change in vocational or independent living status at 3 month follow-up after discharge from services) is closely dependent on the VR&E processing of Chapter 31 applications and timely interventions on their part for the population of veterans/active duty members who apply. The Voc Rehab Program at Tampa conducts an annual strategic planning activity, and one or more of the Regional Office staff has participated in this collaborative strategic planning retreat for the past 3 years. Through this avenue, the needs of the VR&E Program at St. Petersburg are identified and incorporated into the strategic plan for the Voc Rehab Program at Tampa.

Out-stationing of VBA Counselor/Regional Office Liaison at Tampa VA

A unique and positive contributor to the development of a strong partnership between VBA St. Petersburg and VHA Tampa has been the long-standing out-stationing of a Veterans Benefits Counselor and Regional Office Liaison at the Tampa VA Hospital. This individual has been and continues to be an invaluable resource for the staff of the Tampa VA Voc Rehab Program.

Appendix 14-C

Best Practices

“No Man Is An Island”

Independent Living Initiative

New York Regional Office
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Division
Contact Person: Mr. Bernard Finger
Telephone Number: (212) 807-7229, Extension 3028

The “No Man is an Island” pilot project is a joint effort of the New York Regional Office Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Division and the Comprehensive Day Treatment Program at the Northport VAMC. Pooling the resources of these separately-funded programs into an integrated and cohesive whole, the goal of the pilot project is to make fuller use of present VA resources to assist a population of seriously-disabled hospitalized veterans. Currently, 60 disabled veterans are at various stages in their training. This population of veterans, consists of seriously-mentally ill veterans who have been unable to manage in the world of work or with normal socialization. Their predominant diagnoses are schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and PTSD along with many physical and medical needs. Post training testing results have thus far demonstrated the following benefits: (1) a reduction in hospitalizations (no veteran in training has needed inpatient hospitalization), (2) a marked decrease in appointment cancellations by the veterans, (3) fewer psychological symptoms of distress reported, and (4) an overall gain in measures of quality of life particularly in the areas of self-esteem, learning, and socialization. This program is now being expanded to the Hudson Valley and Albany, NY VAMCs for both the mentally ill and spinal cord disabled veterans receiving treatment at these institutions.

For those that need more real-time interactive learning, we came across information on the new Digital Wall Display – interactive blackboards. These boards display written material, text, charts, moving pictures and audio – all of which can be transmitted instantaneously to any WINDOWS PC in the world, turning an off-site PC into a portable interactive blackboard. The thinking excites the imagination. We can develop an electronic interactive arena that aids in the reduction of isolation and involves the incarcerated veteran in the learning process. Our partners in this endeavor will be the New York Institute of Technology and the State Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES).

VR&E staff, in conjunction with the University, BOCES, and VHA staff will develop the curricula, transmission styles, testing, and feedback mechanisms that will be used, and we will share our experience with the US Department of Education, through their state-funded counterpart. This is indeed ground-breaking and very rewarding work and may indeed serve as the pathway to general learning, as our society evolves into a an e-society.

Disabled Veterans Small Business Initiative

The New York Regional Office, VR&E Division, has forged a partnership with representatives from the Region II, US General Services Administration, and the Small Business Administration to make opportunities available for veteran-owned and service-disabled veteran-owned businesses, through the initiation of series of outreach workshops, each to be geared around specific industry groups, the first of which was held on Tuesday, June 24, 2003 for the IT and construction services industries.

The New York Regional Office hosted the first in this series on June 24, 2003 in our third floor conference room to help veterans, disabled-veterans, and their families:

- Learn about federal opportunities available in Information Technology and Construction
- Learn about GSA's, SBA's and VA's various veterans programs and services
- Network with small business decision makers, including representatives from GSA's Federal Supply Service, Public Buildings Service, and Federal Technology Service Representatives from the Region II Social Security Administration, including members of their "Ticket to Work" staff.

Section 502 of Public Law 106-50, the Veterans Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Act of 1999, sets a 3 percent government-wide goal for participation by small businesses owned and controlled by service-disabled veterans in federal contracting and subcontracting. The law is implemented through letters issued to agencies by the Small Business Administration (SBA).

The New York VR&E Division is dedicated toward providing economic support and empowerment for every service-connected disabled veteran and small-business disabled-veteran entrepreneur and to provide resource information for service-disabled veterans who are considering business ownership through coupling service-disabled veterans with local SBA-sponsored technical and managerial assistance. Our services are open to individuals who were discharged or released from active duty because of a service-connected disability, who are entitled to compensation under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

The above conference-workshop is one of many planned to offer our disabled veterans information on Evaluating Franchise Opportunities; Writing a Business Plan; and Raising Capital, as well as the Stages for Entrepreneurial growth as defined by the Veterans Business Outreach Program. These stages include: (1) pre-business plan workshop, (2) concept assessment, (3) preparing a business plan, and (4) entrepreneurial training.

Federal Executive Board "One-Stop Government"

Staffs from the VR&E Division and Veterans Benefits and Services Division Field staff personnel have also joined to provide a VBA presence at Federal Executive Board "One-Stop Government" events. These involve a joint federal-state local agency task force dedicated to bringing real time services to the local community. In these events, representatives from federal, state, and local government agencies, including the Social Security Administration, the Internal Revenue Service, the Department of Housing

and Urban Development, the Food and Services Administration, the Administration on Aging, the Health Resources and Services Administration, the New York City Department for the Aging, the New York City Human Resources Administration, and the state office for Elderly Pharmaceutical Insurance Coverage, provide One-Stop, coordinated services to members of the local community. These events help citizens see their local, state, and federal government working together to provide them benefits and services. Many participants come to these events for their first encounter with a public service organization.

Together we have served more than 1,500 New York citizens through these events. What we did was special! Like any new concept, its development took time and hard work. However, the final product, delivered over these past two years, represented a level of care and intervention far beyond what is normally expected in government. The level of cooperation among the agencies involved was exemplary.

New York State's Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP)

The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Division (VR&E) has an MOU that allows employees from New York State's Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) to work as an integral part of the New York Regional Office's rehabilitation team. The VR&E staff provides the education and vocational training that gives disabled veterans the basic skills needed to do the job; while the New York State employees assist in locating employment opportunities for veterans by using their own extensive network of employee/employers contacts as well as the Department of Labor Job Bank. The partnership has significantly increased the number of disabled veterans the New York Regional Office has helped. In Fiscal Year 1995, there were 79 disabled veterans rehabilitated with average salaries of \$24,867. In Fiscal Year 2002, there were 285 rehabilitations with working veterans earning an average salary of \$30,840 (per CWINRS Reports).

SSA Jobs Linkage

The Regional Social Security Administration, Human Resources Center Director was contacted by the New York Regional Office VR&E Division. In response, SSA agreed to set aside 35 percent of their forthcoming job openings, in two classifications for the New York Regional Office VR&E participants: Teleservice Representative (TSR) GS 5 target 7 (requires two years of college, any degree) and Claims Representative (CR) GS 7 target 11 (requires a Bachelors Degree).

Accommodation will be provided by SSA, but under the guidance of the VR&E Division. Additionally, at the request of New York VR&E, SSA agreed to find work duties for temporary paid internships for VR&E disabled veterans that could automatically be converted to career conditional appointments. VR&E has invited SSA to send a HR representative to meet with their counselors to help facilitate the job matching process.

This integration and interagency support was enhanced through other cooperative activities. For instance, the VR&E Division has provided key support to the SSA "Ticket to Work" initiative, to help SSA Disability claimants (our disabled veterans), become self-supporting. The Division also has provided substantial support to the Federal Executive Board "Government Working Together in your Community" initiative, in which SSA plays a lead role.

United States Postal Service

Staff from the division worked with employees of Veterans Benefits and Services Division (VBSD) and the medical staff of the US Post Office, to find ways to expedite the information needed by the U.S. Postal Service's Personnel and Medical Departments to expedite the placement of our veterans. The joint team was able to define the records that were needed and were able to get the Postal Service's Medical Officer to considerably reduce documentation requirements. The results of the partnership with the U.S. Post Office are significant. Since the beginning of this partnership in October 28,1999, the VR&E Division has referred 220 disabled veterans. Of these, 92 had disabilities rated over 30 percent. The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment staff has thus far helped place 79 disabled veterans and there are 30 awaiting placement. In addition to the above, a number of other qualified veterans, some disabled (who were not found eligible for Chapter 31) were referred to USPS for postal positions and were hired.

Services For Incarcerated Veterans (Initial Stages)

In addition, to the many veteran(s) groups served by this program, New York VR&E, in conjunction with the Veterans Integrated Service Network (VISN) 3 and 4, also serves currently incarcerated, soon to be released work permit prisoners, and newly released ex-convicts. For those with long-term convictions, we plan to develop a virtual e-based learning system to meet their needs.

We believe that it is possible to set up a computer using the Remote Access feature that comes with the newer Windows Operating Systems. The remote computer could then be configured by the System Administrator to allow access to specific files or programs. Other programs could be blocked to limit access as well. We are on the verge of being able to construct individualized structured programs of study for our incarcerated veterans. Better yet, these courses will not be time-bound, but will be provided through the use dedicated website chat rooms, where the students can log on at any time of the day and night. (Some of our veterans can only function in the wee hours of the morning when the dark and silence provide safety and peace.)

Additional Planned VR&E - VHA Activities

ABCs of Cooking

This program will provide the foundation for veterans who are living on their own to prepare healthy and nutritious meals. They will gain the skills and knowledge utilized by kitchen personnel, including safety procedures, sanitation, kitchen management, and food cost control. They will also learn how to prepare simple recipes that demonstrate their acquired knowledge of the basic food groups. Upon successful completion, veterans will have learned the skills necessary to safely manage their kitchen environment, purchase foods that are nutritious, and prepare well-balanced meals for themselves.

Desktop Publishing

This program will be available to veterans that have completed the basic computer training and have shown a strong interest in art, photography and writing. Utilizing Microsoft Desktop Publisher, they will learn general desktop publishing and design techniques, layout, typography, writing, printing, publishing, and other facets of

graphic art, which will enable the CDTP to create a veteran-published newsletter. Upon successful completion, veterans will have acquired the knowledge to publish a newsletter while building skills that can be applied in the future to other types of projects.

ABC Program

The purpose of the ABC program is to enhance the academic proficiencies of severely-disabled service connected veterans in the areas of vocabulary, writing, reading, and mathematics. In order to motivate the students to be successful, lessons will challenge students to write their own journals. Materials will be provided by the Western Suffolk Board of Cooperative Educational Services to enable the veterans to create their own journals for possible publication through resources provided by the VAMC. Upon successful completion of the program, veterans will be able to communicate and relate at a higher academic level more effectively. In addition, we will teach the participants how to use mathematics in daily life activities. By meeting the above objectives and goals for the ABC program, these veterans will become more confident in their ability to interact with others.