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VA pushes for employment inclusivity during Compensated Work Therapy Vocational Rehabilitation Week

WASHINGTON — In recognition of [National Disability Employment Awareness Month](#), the Department of Veterans Affairs is observing Compensated Work Therapy Vocational Rehabilitation Week, Oct. 17-21 at its facilities nationwide as part of its efforts to increase employment inclusivity and vocational rehabilitation services for Veterans with disabilities.

The services provided through the [CWT program](#) are integrated with clinical care to assist Veterans with serious mental illness, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, polytrauma and traumatic brain injury, substance use disorder, homelessness, and other psychosocial issues that may interfere with securing meaningful employment.

"The core philosophy of compensated work therapy is that given the right support, all persons with a disability can contribute productively to the workforce," said National Director of Veterans Health Administration Vocational Rehabilitation Service Shana K. Bakken, Ph.D. "VHA's vocational rehabilitation teams are working to ensure every Veteran who has a goal of employment has the opportunity to make a worthwhile contribution in their local communities through meaningful work."

Veteran and VA File Clerk Mike Onrubia credits VA Vocational Rehabilitation Specialist Holly Starks with helping him get a job at the Hampton VA Healthcare System which he says helped turn his life around.

"I applied for the File Clerk/Scanner position at Hampton VA and started work the day after Labor Day and I love my job," said Onrubia. "For the first time in over a decade, I feel like I can work toward my dream of working as a social worker and then a psychologist, helping out my fellow Veterans and giving them hope like Ms. Starks did for me. My daughter is in school and I look forward to going back myself, all thanks to Ms. Holly Starks."

This is an example of how VA's integrated care positively affects a Veteran's whole well-being, to include financial independence.

Often, individuals with disabilities have been placed in [sheltered workshops](#) and sheltered employment, which may separate them from workers in the general population. In August, VA discontinued operations of prevocational programs, including sheltered workshops and programs that pay sub-minimum wage.

CWT programs are located at all VA health care systems across the nation and VA staff have developed partnerships with local, regional and national businesses, industry and government agencies to provide Veteran candidates for employment.

VA employs over 800 rehabilitation counselors, vocational rehabilitation specialists, managers and peer support specialists who provide services to more than 52,000 Veterans each year within the VA health care system.

Learn more about [VA's CWT program](#).

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