

Director's Report

February 2, 2015

Pre-Employment Transition Services

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act was passed by Congress and signed by the President in 2014. After 16 years of continuing resolutions for WIA and the Rehabilitation Act, Congress joined in a bi-partisan effort to pass a new workforce bill. We knew that there would be a focus on serving youth in transition and a 15% set aside for serving youth with disabilities and we were not concerned given our existing commitment to serve youth. What we did not know until the definitions in the Act were made available was that the 15% set aside would be restricted to in-school youth on an IEP or 504 plan. In addition, there are five required services four of which are work based and two which focus on independent living services. This requirement means we have to make dramatic changes in our service delivery system to come into compliance with the new law or face returning up to \$2.25 million to the federal treasury. In year one the 15% amounts to \$1.3 million and because of reallocation funding goes to \$2.25 million in year two. So after an initial stage of denial and a trip to the fall meeting of the VR Directors where RSA was quite clear about the definition of in-school youth, the senior management team made a set of decisions which were reviewed with Commissioner Wehry and some with Secretary Cohen. The following represents the plan as it stands today:

1. We will do a complete caseload reassignment by age to include roughly 14.5 in-school youth counselors, 14.5 young adult counselors, and 28.5 adults counselors. We have almost completed the process of who will take what roles but the actual transfer of cases will be done between now and July 1, 2015. Young Adult counselors will be paired with in-school youth counselors to ensure a seamless transfer from one to the other as the youth exits school. This transfer will begin six months prior to exiting school.
2. We will be ending the rehabilitation program for General Assistance recipients. We will be reconfiguring the way we provide services to GA recipients without dedicated counselors. We are very sad about this decision as very good work has been done by the GA counselors and the GA employment staff with very good results.
3. After 30 plus years of supporting employment work within the CRT programs at the Designated Agencies, we will be redirecting that funding to expand the JOBS programs within the Designated Agencies to serve in-school youth and broaden the age range to 26. JOBS have long wanted to serve in school youth as an early intervention strategy. With one exception Designated Agencies will be held harmless financially with this redirection of resources.
4. We will be creating the administrative infrastructure to support all of these changes which will be a major piece of work.
5. We will be creating a statewide summer youth employment program. We will be ramping up in first year and fully operational in year two.

6. We will be creating a system where our benefits counselors will be serving in school youth and their families.
7. We will be requiring Developmental Services Programs within the designated agencies to use 15% of their VR grant funds to provide the required services to in-school youth. Some of the agencies do this work currently and some do not. We will create a work group with DS staff to develop the services and billing mechanisms.
8. We will be working with VCIL and VFN to provide self advocacy training and peer mentoring and other services for in school youth.

Overall, we are convinced that if we do a really good job of providing services to in school youth from 14 to 22 that they will be much better prepared to make the transition from school to post secondary education, training and work.

I am off to a New England Directors Meeting at Assumption College, Worcester, MA tomorrow to discuss WIOA and Pre-Employment Transition Services. I will share what I learn with you.

AWARE Case Management System

The process to purchase the AWARE case management system has been launched! A timeline is in place. We have hired Lisa Young, as the AWARE Project Manager and Quality Assurance/Performance Management Manager. Lisa was the Associate Regional Manager for Burlington and Middlebury offices. We are very pleased she has agreed to take on the role of project manager. Finally we are really on our way to a functional, user friendly, integrated case management system. HOORAY!

SNAP Employment and Training Pilot Projects

It would appear that Vermont's application for close to a \$10 million grant from the Federal Department of Agriculture is the final running for funding. We have responded to two sets of questions. Deadline for notification is the end of February. VR, VDOL, DCF/ESD and a host of community partners represented by Capstone are the primary authors and partners. Stay tuned.

Updates:

- Greg Voorheis has started work as the DAIL/VR Mature Worker Coordinator.
- VT VR is part of a four state effort to secure funding from the US Congress to support an SSDI Early Intervention Pilot Project with ALSOP, a national company that assists people to apply for SSI and SSDI.