The Role of Vocational Rehabilitation in Supporting Employment

JS= Jim Sheldon
SP= Susan Piper
RH= Ron Hager
AF= Alexis Falise

AF - Good afternoon, welcome to our final broadcast in the Work Incentive Utilization Series focusing on the State and Federal Vocational Rehabilitation System. My name is Alexis Falise and I will be standing in for Thomas Golden who is speaking at the World Congress on Intellectual Disabilities this week in Montpelier, France. I am with the Employment and Disability Institute (formerly the Program on Employment and Disability) here at Cornell University in the School of Industrial and Labor Relations and on behalf of Thomas want to extend his sincere apologies for not being able to conclude this series of programming.

In preparation for today’s broadcast you each received electronically a Power Point File to follow along with and you should have the file open and in “Slide Show” mode at this time. Throughout the program today we will advance you through the slides referencing the number in the top right hand corner of each slide. You also received an electronic resource directory that we will be referencing throughout the broadcast today. At this time everyone should be on the title slide -- SLIDE #1. By way of reminder, if you would like to take notes during today’s program you can do so directly in the Power Point Presentation by clicking on the “View” button across the top of the screen and scrolling down to “Note Pages”. By clicking “Note Pages” you open both the slide as well as text box in which to type any notes you might like to take while following along.

As you will note on SLIDE #2, This series of continuing education distance learning programs has been designed by Cornell University in collaboration with Neighborhood Legal Services, Inc of Buffalo with sponsorship from a grant to the Research Foundation for Mental Hygiene from the U.S. Department of Labor with the support of the New York State Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (DDPC) and the New York State Department of Education’s Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID). The thoughts and opinions the trainers will be expressing in today’s broadcast are those of the trainers and do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints or official policy positions of our sponsors or any other state or federal agency. The information, materials and technical assistance are intended solely as informal guidance and are neither a determination of legal rights or responsibilities, nor binding on any agency with implementation and/or administrative responsibilities for programs discussed.
Facilitating our call today is Jim Sheldon, Supervising Attorney of the Disability Law Unit at Neighborhood Legal Services, Inc. in Buffalo. And with that said, I will leave it to you Jim to introduce our trainers today.

JS - As referenced on SLIDE #3, joining us today is a team of experts to aid in understanding more about the federally funded vocational rehabilitation system, how it helps individuals with disabilities reach employment, and the interplay of vocational rehabilitation and One Stop services. Susan Piper is the VESID Regional Coordinator for the Western New York area. She oversees the Buffalo District Office of VESID and has coordination responsibilities with the Rochester District Office. Ms. Piper holds a Master’s degree in Rehabilitation counseling. She has over twenty years experience in providing vocational services to individuals with disabilities, both in community based service delivery and state vocational rehabilitation roles. As part of her VESID responsibility, Ms Piper is an active member of 5 Workforce investment Boards, serving a 9 county area, and interfacing with 14 OneStop centers.

Also joining me today is Ron Hager. Ron is a graduate of the University of Buffalo Law School and a staff attorney at Neighborhood Legal Services (NLS). He has provided legal back up support to the Client Assistance Program advocates in Western New York for several years on the vocational rehabilitation program (VR) and, as part of NLS’s National Assistive Technology Advocacy Project, has written and trained extensively about the VR program.

Let me thank you all for joining us as we discuss the VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SYSTEM FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES. During today’s call we want to encourage participants to forward via email any questions that you may have pertaining to our topic. As referenced on SLIDE #4, your questions can be forwarded to ac258@cornell.edu and we will take as many of those questions as possible at the end of today’s call. You will note that email is different today, than our previous teleconferences, so please make sure to send your questions to the correct email address. Again, that is ac258@cornell.edu. If you don’t have email you can also call your questions into our toll free line at 1-888-224-3272. We also want to extend our sincere thanks to Marta Santiago, who is staffing our toll free line today.

We will also have a transcript of today’s program available and will provide directions for requesting that transcript at the end of the call.
Vocational Rehabilitation

So Susan, let’s get started. As we turn to **SLIDE #5**, can you begin with a general explanation of what vocational rehabilitation entails, and how it can assist people with disabilities in gaining employment?

SP - Certainly. I won’t go into great detail about the history of vocational rehabilitation, but its important for people to know that the Federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (the RSA) funds voc rehab services in every state, and that in NYS there are three types of federally supported VR services available. In NYS, the majority of people with disabilities are served by the agency I represent – VESID -- which stands for Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (you can see why they had to come up with an acronym!). VESID is housed under the NYS Education Department, and shares its name with the other branch of State Education that coordinates special education services for in school youth with disabilities.

Today I’ll be speaking primarily about VESID’s vocational services to help adults achieve employment, although I will also mention a few things regarding our efforts to help youth with disabilities successfully transition from secondary school to an adult career path. My colleague, Ron Hager will also be providing some information about another federal vocational rehab program-the Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped, known as CBVH, and housed within the NYS Division for Family Services. The third federal vocational rehabilitation program available in NYS is a unique initiative designed to assist American Indians with disabilities, who are enrolled tribal members, and living on tribal lands. We are proud to work cooperatively with both the Seneca Nation and the Mohawks on these programs. They are the first two such programs awarded funding on this side of the Mississippi, and provide culturally relevant services to their participants.

JS - Susan, as our listeners turn to **SLIDE #6**, could you describe for us what the mission of these programs is?

SP - Of course, Jim. The primary mission of all 3 components is to assist individuals whose disabling conditions would otherwise be a barrier to employment, to receive the needed combination of services and support to achieve employment. I think that is the first major training point- while there are a number of things VESID may purchase in support of someone’s employment plan, we are an agency that is focused on helping people go to work. A referral to VESID should be based on that desired outcome.
On SLIDE # 7, you can see that another key concept is that we are a totally voluntary program. We have no capacity to “mandate” someone to work with us, even if we believe we are the most appropriate provider for the person. Now a number of our consumers may be involved with other systems that DO mandate they participate with us—the Department of Social Services (DSS), or Parole are two examples—we can work cooperatively with that arrangement, as long as we get a signed release of information from the person—but we have no ability or desire to force someone to be a VESID consumer. This will be discussed in more detail when we talk about the potential overlap of VESID and OneStop services.

JS - Susan if I were considering a referral to VESID, what eligibility criteria should I be looking at?

SP - When I talk about VESID, probably the hardest question to answer is “who is eligible for VESID services”. Although Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) recipients receive special considerations, VESID is not an entitlement program; each application has to be reviewed against strict federal criteria. While there are some general guidelines that I can share with you, literally every case has to be determined on its own merits—the best rule of thumb is to discuss the linkage with a VESID counselor—our number is in the state government section of phone books, and there are VESID staff members present in almost every OneStop in the state.

JS - As our listeners turn to SLIDE #8, Susan, could you tell us what factors VESID will look at when determining eligibility?

SP - The three components of VESID eligibility are the existence of a disabling condition, that is a barrier to attaining/maintaining employment, and that the individual requires VESID services to be successful in overcoming that barrier. Let me go through these in more detail:

What do we mean when we say the disabling condition must be a barrier to attaining or maintaining employment? Often people ask, “what type of disability makes a person VESID eligible?” VESID potentially can assist individuals with many types of disabilities, including any type of physical or mental impairment. Chemical abuse, or HIV/AIDS may also result in a disability that qualifies for VESID services. (As Ron will discuss later, only those people who are legally blind are not served by VESID, but by the CBVH).

The crucial consideration is how that condition impacts on that particular person, in relation to their employability. No two people with the same diagnosis
experience their disability in exactly the same way, or bring the same transferable skills, interests and abilities to their employment situation. What the VESID counselor has to assess in order to certify eligibility is the functional limitations created for a particular applicant, and how those limitations impact on the person’s ability to choose, get and keep employment.

JS - Susan, as we turn to SLIDE #9, maybe you could give our listeners some examples to help us better understand this.

SP - Sure, Jim. One individual may have had severe hearing loss from birth, and has had resulting difficulties with spoken language. His speech is very difficult to understand, he becomes very anxious when speaking in public, and has also suffered from chronic depression. Another individual may have exactly the same degree of measured hearing loss, but the loss occurred as an adult, following an illness. This person has clear speech, a preexisting job, remains very socially competent, and has been able to maintain his previous employment utilizing email and other written communication when needed. The first person has a number of areas where his functioning is limited, and that directly creates barriers to employment. While the second person has some limitations, they have not impacted on his ability to work.

Lets also look at an example of a situation where the person may have a disabling condition, including functional limitations, but does not require VESID services for employment. Two gentlemen may have both come to experience severe and chronic lower back pain, both due to the same type of spinal disc degeneration. They have experienced similar limitations on lifting, bending and can’t stand for long periods. The one individual is a college teacher, and finds that he can get to classes and still perform his job. The other individual is a construction worker, and finds he can not function in his work site. The college professor doesn’t require VESID services, but clearly our friend the construction worker does, and would be found eligible.

The one exception to the VESID eligibility discussion is those folks who Social Security has awarded SSI or SSDI- in those instances, for current recipients, since another federal agency has determined that the person has a substantial barrier to employment that limits their working, VESID can presume the person is also eligible for VESID services. However, since the most important thing VESID does is develop a personalized plan for employment, based on the person’s unique disability factors, we still need all their medical info to go on to step two with them.
JS - Now, as we move on to **SLIDE #10**, who makes this eligibility determination, Susan?

SP - For providers who work with VESID, the bottom line is that its not very fruitful to struggle with the “who is eligible” question- the most helpful thing you can do is share information about VESID/CBVH services with potential consumers, and explain to the individual that the more medical info they can provide to VESID, the better, both for eligibility and for future planning.

As shown on **SLIDE #11**, you can also help by explaining that the eligibility certification process is a very complicated one, and the sooner medical information documenting the extent and impact of the disability are received the quicker the determination can occur. If you would turn to **SLIDE #12**, you will see that VESID provides orientation groups that explain the VESID process and services; in some areas, these groups are held in OneStop settings. VESID also has specialized medical report forms that people may wish to give their doctor to ensure the right information is provided. Call your local VESID office for details.

JS - Ron, would you like to give an overview of the Commission for the Blind and their eligibility considerations before we go into more detail about VESID?

RH- Well, Jim, because both VESID and CBVH are governed by the same federal law, almost everything that Susan has discussed about VESID will also apply to CBVH. Of course, the major difference will be that CBVH will serve individuals who are legally blind. In addition, CBVH receives other sources of funding that enables it to provide services to children and older people who are legally blind that do not involve the rehabilitation process.

JS - Before we go any further, now might be a good time to remind our listeners that if you have any questions, as shown on **SLIDE # 13** you should be sure to email them to ac258@cornell.edu and we will take as many of those questions as possible at the end of today’s call. If you don’t have email you can also call your questions into our toll free line at 1-888-224-3272.

Susan, could you address the types of services available through VESID, and the potential interaction with services available through the OneStops?

SP - Sure. The interaction of all the Partner agencies in OneStop settings is a continually evolving arrangement, especially as funding shifts and new Workforce
Investment Act (WIA) legislation is on the table. In the various WIA partner groups that I participate in, there has been a lot of discussion about the variety of vocational services, what all the partners do, how much overlap there really is – sort of a “who’s on first” discussion when all the participants are federally funded, and are used to being the “provider of last resort.” What I have been stressing in those situations is that when you are trying to match up consumer needs and providers, you have to look to what is it that VESID (or CBVH) does that is unique. Many of the “vocational” services we offer may look a lot like the generic vocational interventions. However, the part of our process that is really critical to the employment success of an individual with a disability related barrier to employment is the “rehabilitation” focus we bring to the interventions.

JS - When VESID or CBVH is involved, is there a document that is developed for the individual?

SP - The development of the employment plan –we call it the Individual Plan for Employment, or IPE- is based on careful consideration of the usual vocational planning factors- the interests and abilities of the person, the work experience, transferable skills, their educational background, credentials and also the economic realities of the area – what kind of employment opportunities are there locally, is the person willing to move-all of the standard considerations. What the VESID counselor adds that is different however is what the disability factors are that have to be addressed in the plan. That disability specific focus can play out in a number of ways: It may be identifying some types of employment situations that are contraindicated because of the physical limitations imposed by the disability – some one with a severe back problem is not a good candidate for a long distance trucking job- some one with a seizure disorder triggered by light is not likely to be an arc welder – the VESID counselor is aware of these sorts of considerations, and also knows the types of functional capacity evaluations, or other tests that can help determine what the limitations really are for the person.

Similarly, the VESID counselor knows the types of rehabilitation technology that may be available to enable the person to overcome disability related limitations, or other forms of support that may make certain jobs possible. We have a number of good resources in the technology field too, to help evaluate and prescribe exactly the type of support mechanism that will do what’s needed. When the IPE is developed, it brings together the traditional vocational planning perspective with the rehabilitation considerations, and the resulting plan is an outline of the types of services and supports it will take to get that person, with their unique disability related factors, to the desired outcome. While it is legally possible for another
provider or a VESID consumer themselves to develop an IPE and bring it to VESID for consideration, I really don’t recommend that approach- even with a consumer shared between a couple of partner agencies, you want the rehabilitation counselor’s input on plan development.

JS - Susan, as we transition to SLIDE #14, may VESID or CBVH consider the financial resources of the consumer?

SP - Most definitely, Jim. Potential VESID services are limited by some considerations. Like every other federally funded program, VESID has some rules about what we can and can’t sponsor, and some of the potential items in an employment plan require meeting “Economic Need”- an income threshold for VESID to provide sponsorship. However, as with eligibility, if someone is an SSI or SSDI recipient, they are automatically considered to meet Economic Need, and that is also true for Social Service recipients.

As we look at SLIDE #15, we can see some of the “services” VESID can offer, I want to make it clear the answer is not a Chinese menu of take 2 from column A and 3 from column B …the available services are based on the disability related needs, and the agreed upon employment goal. Each consumer is eligible for those VESID allowable services that are necessary to achieve that person’s goal. If you do not have a mobility impairment, we’re not going to modify a van for you. If you are not in a field that requires it, we’re not going to purchase a computer- but if it’s needed for your goal, and within our rules, then those are indeed things we might offer. In that context, lets look at a list of possibilities. As I just elaborated, the more “traditional” employment services that VESID provides- the assessment and job counseling, are done from a rehabilitation perspective.

JS - Susan, could you clarify for us how old a consumer has to be in order to be referred to VESID?

SP - I know you’ve heard this before, but the answer is “it depends,” because its not based on the person’s age per se. We are mandated to work with “post secondary” youth. If some one is a 16 year old drop out with a significant disability, we potentially could work with that person. However if the services they need are “pre vocational”- such as a GED, we’d be providing linkage, but wouldn’t be able to fund those services. Often we help people get services they should have received through the schools by advocating for their re-enrollment. We also link dropouts to other partner programs that target this population.
We call the linkage process for disabled students into adult services “Transition,” and it’s a major focus of our work. We have a VESID counselor linked with every high school in the State, and we try to provide teacher education and consultation to enhance the referral process.

If a disabled student is still in high school, we can begin to work with that person in his/her junior year to establish eligibility and linkages, but we can generally only pay for services in the last semester before they exit high school.

JS - Can VESID send a student to college?

SP - As you recall from a few questions back, Jim, the vocational plan, the IPE, is built on numerous factors including the person’s abilities and interests, and what training is needed to achieve the goal. If a plan is agreed upon that requires a college degree, be it 2 or 4 year, VESID can generally provide a portion of the sponsorship, assuming the person meets the Economic Need criteria. We also can generally sponsor a portion of the person’s book costs, and may also be able to help with either room and board or transportation. College isn’t considered as a distinct service, though, because it falls under the wide umbrella of “vocational education.”

As we turn to SLIDE #16, you can see that there are other services we can provide. Several of the items relate to specialized needs some consumers with mobility or other driving related impairments may have for specialized driver evaluations, training, and perhaps vehicle modifications. There is also a wide array of interventions that can fall under the rehabilitation technology category—everything from computers controlled by very limited physical movement to specially adapted chairs.

JS - Could you clarify for us if Medicaid is a factor in some of these more medically related items?

SP - It certainly may be. Our federal requirements say we have to pursue “similar benefits” wherever possible in looking to fund a particular expenditure. If there is another available funding source, such as Medicaid, we must look to see how much of the costs can be covered in that manner. I think a great example of that is something that Neighborhood Legal Services helped us work out in Erie County, where the costs of power wheel chairs for VESID consumers who are also Medicaid recipients is being split along the percentage of vocational versus non-work related use of the chair. In any situation where similar benefits are available,
the VEID counselor will help the consumer to pursue them, and in difficult situations, that help may include linkage to advocacy organizations such as NLS in Western New York, or similar agencies in other parts of the State.

JS - Given all the types of things you may be involved in sponsoring, I can see that some very complex situations may arise. What happens if someone disagrees with VESID about the plan, or something else? Ron, as we turn to SLIDE # 17, could you elaborate?

RH - Well, as with all federally sponsored services, there is a very specific set of options available to the consumer who disagrees with VESID or CBVH. Ideally, it gets talked out and resolved, either with the counselor or perhaps with a supervisor, but if not, there are a number of options.

To begin with, anyone seeking or receiving VR services who is dissatisfied with a decision by the VR agency has a right to appeal. A VESID decision may be appealed within 90 days of receiving the written decision. A CBVH decision may be appealed within 60 days. VESID and CBVH must notify individuals, in writing, of their appeal rights and the availability of the Client Assistance Program (CAP) at the following times: at the application; when the IPE is developed; and upon the reduction, suspension or cessation of VR services.

If there is a dispute, mediation must now be offered, at a minimum, whenever an impartial hearing is requested. However, in each case, participation must be voluntary for both the individual and the state. In addition, involvement in mediation cannot be used to deny or delay the right to an impartial hearing. The state bears the costs of mediation. All discussions that occur during mediation are confidential and cannot be used at any subsequent hearing.

In addition to mediation, three types of appeal are available: an informal conference with the individual’s counselor and the counselor’s senior counselor; a formal administrative review with the district manager; and an administrative hearing. The vast majority of disputes are resolved in an informal conference or administrative review and given the complexity and adversary nature of the hearing process, it is much better when the case can be resolved informally. But, if it is not resolved informally, the individual is entitled to a hearing before an impartial administrative law judge (ALJ). A written request for a conference or administrative review is also considered a request for a hearing, for the purposes of meeting the deadline for requesting a hearing. The hearing must be scheduled within 45 days after it is requested, and the individual must be notified of the
hearing date no later than 14 days before the hearing.

JS - What happens at a hearing?

RH - Well, the individual has the right to be represented at the hearing by an attorney or other advocate. If the individual brings an attorney, the VR agency will as well. Although less formal than court, it operates much like a case would in court. Both the individual and the agency can present evidence and cross examine witnesses. The Administrative Law Judge, or ALJ, will hear the evidence and legal arguments and make a decision on the record. The ALJ will send copies of his decision to the individual, his or her representative if there was one, the district manager and the agency Director in Albany.

Either party may appeal the final decision in state or federal court. An individual dissatisfied with a final agency decision should consult with an attorney as soon as possible because there are strict time limits for filing the court appeal. Based on similar rulings in the special education area, it is expected that this time frame will be four months. Pending review in court, the final administrative decision must be implemented.

JS - Ron, this sounds like a very complex set of options- is there anyone available to assist someone who is looking to pursue this path?

RH - Yes, there is a service called the Client Assistance Program (CAP). CAP is funded under the federal Rehabilitation Act, just like VESID and CBVH. It is designed to provide information to individuals concerning their rights in the VR process and to provide advocacy services in resolving disputes, including representation at the informal attempts to resolve the case and at the administrative hearings. Any time an individual does not understand the proposed IPE, rights under the Rehabilitation Act, or receives an adverse decision from VESID or CBVH, he or she can contact the appropriate CAP office for assistance. CAP advocates are usually very effective at the informal conference or administrative review level. Should a hearing be necessary, CAP advocates are versed in the law and procedures necessary to conduct a hearing. There is a CAP office located at a number of the Independent Living Centers across the State.

JS - Thank you, Ron. Now lets focus more specifically on the interaction of One Stop and VESID services if we can. Susan, from the first part of your presentation, its apparent that there are significant overlaps between the services that VESID
potentially might be sponsoring, and training that someone receiving One Stop intensive services might access. Could you talk about the roles of VESID and the One Stop in sponsoring people who meet eligibility criteria for both services?

SP - I’d be happy to do that, because there are a number of ways good collaboration can take place, but I think it might be helpful to start by turning to Ron once again, to provide us with a clarification from an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standpoint on the rights of an individual with a disability when it comes to OneStop services.

RH - Well, to start, on August 7, 1998, President Clinton signed into law the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA. Although Congress had contemplated merging the VR system into the WIA, VR is maintained as a separate program to meet the unique vocational training needs of people with disabilities. But, the vocational training opportunities of the state workforce investment system are clearly intended to be available to individuals with disabilities.

The WIA is a major federal effort to incorporate a myriad of federal job training programs into a coordinated, comprehensive system. The WIA was implemented by creation of state “One-Stop” service delivery systems. The intent is to eliminate the old system where individuals or employers had to seek information and services from a variety of sources which was “often costly, discouraging and confusing.” States and communities must coordinate programs and resources at the “street level” through “user friendly” One-Stops.

States are required to develop statewide and local plans and to include the VR system in that planning process. Moreover, the state VR agency must enter into cooperative agreements with other One-Stop partners and “work toward increasing the capacity of those partners, and the One-Stop system as a whole, to better address the needs of individuals with disabilities.”

JS - Ron, as we turn to SLIDE #18, does “consumer choice” play a role here at all?

RH - Definitely, Jim. There are a couple of basic points that apply here: The first is that, under WIA legislation, anyone seeking a job is entitled to utilize the “Core” One Stop services, and that certainly includes VESID consumers. A problem that we’ve seen in some One Stop settings is that when an individual with a visible disability comes in, the greeter, or partners who are doing the reception function, often feel the appropriate response is to immediately attempt to link the person to VESID, without any exploration of what the individual wants or needs. Its
certainly good to be aware of making linkages to the VESID partners, but the first step to see what the person wants- if it is to use things that are considered Core Services, the disabled customer is entitled to do so. As an added service, the One Stop worker should inquire if the customer is aware of VESID, but a referral to VESID should never replace, or be a prerequisite for the person utilizing Core Services, if that is what’s desired.

Where it becomes somewhat more complicated is if that person with a significant disability also meets the local criteria for OneStop Intensive services. If the person has been informed about VESID services, and for any reason chooses not to utilize them (remember, VESID is a totally voluntary agency- they can’t mandate participation), as we turn to SLIDE #19, we see that under the Americans with Disabilities Act – the ADA, that person is entitled to any service for which he or she meets the local criteria. As we see on you can’t withhold services because the person is disabled. At its heart, the ADA is civil rights legislation, and you can’t discriminate against the disabled relative to the availability of One Stop services. Similarly, the One Stops have an obligation to be physically accessible, and to meet ADA requirements in that way also.

JS - Susan, as we transition to SLIDE #20, I’d like to come at the same question from another angle. Could you describe a best practices scenario of how One Stops and VESID offices can best collaborate to serve folks with dual eligibility?

SP - I would love to, but, I do have to note that the following is drawn from my experience with our 14 One Stop sites- this is a composite. Since the One Stop process is designed with the local partners, we don’t have exactly the same set up in any one of them! Other VESID offices across the state may well have worked out other specific arrangements with their local One Stop partners. What I’m about to describe is a generic menu- if there is an approach that you’d like to see in your local setting, I’m certainly available to provide more detail. Let’s outline the possibilities by starting with our consumer, Joe, at the front door of the One Stop. Joe is a paraplegic, following a motorcycle accident, and he uses a power wheel chair.

Joe is able to enter that front door at the One Stop because the building is ramped and accessible for him. When he comes up to the front counter, its above his reach, but the greeter has been through a disability awareness training from the VESID/CBVH partners, and knows to step out and bring Joe to the wheelchair height table, where she can sit down and speak with him eye to eye, and he can get his chair under the table to enable him to fill out the standard forms.
As our listeners will see on SLIDE #21, she asks Joe all the usual questions about what he is looking for today, and how the One Stop can help him. He expresses interest in looking at job listings in the construction field- he used to be a carpenter before his accident, and he wants to see if he can find some kind of related work. She explains the Swipe card system, the resource room, and how job listings are accessed on the computer. While Joe completes the One Stop Operating System (OSOS) forms, the greeter also contacts the site’s Disability Navigator. (As illustrated in SLIDE #22 - This Center had worked with their VESID and local community based rehabilitation programs to submit an application to the Department of Labor (DOL) for a Navigator position, when the Request For Proposal, or RFP was offered, and were successful in their application. The site is so happy with the help that they’ve gained from having this position, they are looking to the promised future RFPs to see if they can add another person in their satellite location). The Navigator is familiar with all the adaptive equipment the site has gotten from DOL, and the new items they got from another DOL grant they won with the help of the specialized information available from the “Disability Advisory Group” they set up with VESID and those same community agencies that helped with the Navigator grant).

As illustrated on SLIDE #23, the Navigator speaks briefly to Joe about the job search, and set the adjustable computer stand to ensure he can easily work with the computer. She also verifies the regular mouse is fine; Joe doesn’t use a track ball or other adaptive equipment. She mentions that there are a number of partner agencies that work with the One Stop, and that there are some specialized services available to individuals with disabilities. Joe is still adjusting to the dramatic change in his life caused by his accident, and he is very sensitive to the whole idea of being disabled. He is a bit rude to the Navigator, but she takes it in stride, and gives him her card, telling him she’ll be available if he has any trouble with his job search, or if he decides he wants referral info. She also points out a display rack of partner pamphlets, and tells him he can take any that look interesting to him. Since its set low enough to reach from his chair, he grabs a few on his way out.

JS - This is really getting interesting, but before we go any further, now might be a good time to remind our listeners that if you have any questions, as shown on SLIDE #24 you should be sure to email them to ac258@cornell.edu and we will take as many of those questions as possible at the end of today’s call. If you don’t have email you can also call your questions into our toll free line at 1-888-224-3272.
SP - Joe comes back to do computer searches twice more before he asks to see the Navigator. He apologizes for his earlier grumpiness, and expresses his frustration to her- he knows a lot about building houses, but there’s nothing in the job listings that fits; and besides, he doesn’t know how he’d get to a job site- his mom has been driving him around for “errands” but that would never work for every day. Again the Navigator tries to make the VEISD link, but Joe is having nothing to do with an agency that has the word “Disabilities” in its name. He pulls out a One Stop announcement from a local building trades project, and says he’s always been in the Carpenter’s Union, and he wants to hook up with them. As with any other customer who appears to meet the criteria for Intensive services, Joe is then linked to Jill, the Employment Counselor at the site for further screening. Joe is a recent Social Security recipient, and easily meets the financial criteria for training. He goes through the usual academic testing, and when the scores come back the Employment Counselor sees they are high enough meet the criteria for the Building Trades project.

At this point, Jill is very concerned- the building project description doesn’t say anything about physical limitations, but she’s not at all sure they are anticipating the referral of someone in a wheelchair- and Joe’s transportation problems are way beyond the usual ones she’s dealt with. She decides that she needs help- and Bob the VESID counselor will be on site the next day- she’ll ask him for some ideas! Without identifying Joe by name, Jill fills Bob in on the situation.

Bob explains the types of services VESID would look at for someone in Joe’s situation- since Joe is a Social Security recipient, and is clearly looking to become employed, VESID eligibility would not be a question. Joe recently completed treatment in a hospital rehab unit, so there would probably be a lot of information on his physical capacity and limitation. The VESID counselor would study that information, and would also work with Joe to identify his transferable skills and his interests. Together they could identify the physical requirements of the possible occupations that fit Joe’s interests, and what sorts of training or supports would be needed for Joe to enter a particular field. Bob explains that VESID could also provide specialized evaluations to see if a vehicle modification would work for Joe, and if so, the types of modifications he’d need. If Joe could purchase a van, VESID could provide sponsorship of the vehicle modifications. Finally they talk about Jill’s most pressing dilemmas – Joe will be in tomorrow, and until now, he’s refused any VESID links; he also has set his employment hopes on a project that is most likely not equipped to work with him. The two counselors develop a plan for Jill to provide Joe with a lot of info he needs to make a really informed choice about his next steps. Bob also suggests Jill speak with the head of the Building
trades project, to see what the expectations are for trainees, and the type of employment outcomes that result. Bob works Jill through the difficult issues of separating disability rights, consumer choice and realistic goal planning, based on job requirements.

JS - Susan, it sounds like Bob’s involvement is really helping Jill in serving her consumer Joe. As we move forward, what can we expect to happen next using best practices?

SP - The following day, Jill has a long session with Joe- she develops a list with him of all the skills he’s developed over the nine year’s he’s been a carpenter, and also the types of things that interest him. It’s hard to pin down a specific goal, Joe is really unsure what he can do from his wheelchair, or how he’d get around. Jill introduces the info she’s collected on resources for him. She explains that there is an agency that can help with the transportation issues if Joe is working on an employment goal – for the first time Joe is willing to hear about VESID, and in the end accepts a referral, but makes it clear he still wants to work with Jill too. Jill also tells Joe of her conversation with the head of the Building trades project. He’s offered to meet one on one with Joe, and talk about career options, and what the project can/can’t do to assist Joe.

Jill sets Joe up to attend a VESID orientation session at the One Stop the following week, so he’ll have a more complete picture his options, and gets him an appointment with Bob also. Eventually, working with both Bob and Jill, Joe is able to achieve mobility with his modified van, and has identified both a long and short term employment goal. He is linked to the Building trades project for training as an estimator, and he is also shadowing an instructor there – he thinks he may want to eventually teach there, and with some additional college course work his background would qualify him. Since the Building Trades project is an approved vendor for the One Stop, Jill has authorized One Stop sponsorship for that piece. In addition to the $17,000 van modification, the VESID counselor supported the purchase of a lap top computer for Joe, which he needs for the Estimator’s job.

The One Stop job developer helped Joe find an employer who was willing to use him part time for those job sites where wheel chair accessibility is not an issue; the employer was skeptical at first, but VESID sponsored a 4 week Work Try Out, agreeing to pay Joe’s salary so the employer could judge for himself. Now the employer is also using Joe to do some of the review of other estimator’s initial work ups, and Joe has gotten his hours up to about 25 per week. Once Joe has been employed for 90 days, VESID will close his case, but he knows he can return for
more help if he decides to pursue the teaching goal. Although he’ll be exited from intensive services, he knows the One Stop will also remain available to him, and since his wages went from zero to a respectable $15 an hour, he will definitely help their wage gain statistics!

JS - As our listeners flip to SLIDE #25, now that we’ve heard this example, Susan, can we consider some of the specific principles we can draw from it:

SP - While this example relates to a One Stop setting, there are many considerations that apply equally for other partners working with VESID, that help bring the consumer to that happy “employment” ending!

• ACCESSIBLE SITE - This is a basic requirement under the ADA- be sure you not only have an accessible entrance, but that you have enough signage to help someone find it!

• DISABILITY AWARENESS TRAINING – As we turn to SLIDE #26, we see that this is a great resource to help staff feel more comfortable knowing how to respond to individuals with disabilities. If your VESID office can’t provide it directly, they can link you up with someone who can. The Independent Living Centers are another great resource for this type of training.

• INTERIOR WITH DISABILITY ACCOMODATIONS, INCLUDING RESOURCE ROOM (EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS) – Beyond being able to get in the door, accessibility means having some basic rehab technology in place to enable individuals with disabilities to “get at” the same Core services as the rest of the public. Rehab tech is often set up to unique individual specifications, and no one expects that will be available in each One Stop setting- but there should be basic equipment, and ways to access resource room materials. A key is having a few staff members familiar enough with the adaptive equipment that it actually can be used!

• DISABILITY NAVIGATOR (OR STAFF TRAINED TO PROVIDE DISABILITY ASSISTANCE, ESPECIALLY WITH ADAPTIVE EQUIPMENT) –The ideal situation is to have a Disability Navigator position (and the grant is re-offered periodically- stay alert for the opportunity). If that isn’t the case, this role should be discussed among existing One Stop staff, and people should be designated and trained to
provide this type of assistance. The time to start thinking about it is NOT when the disabled customer is waiting at the front desk!

- **SUPPORT FOR CENTER STAFF FROM DISABILITY PROVIDER**
  COMMUNITY-SLIDE #27 shows that this is something more One Stops can take advantage of-in addition to VESID and CBVH, there are numerous local agencies providing disability specific rehabilitation service. They are eager to work with the One Stops to assist the disabled community in seeking employment. A standing advisory group is a great way to discuss general issues, and to have a stand by resource for the unexpected questions.

- **DISABLED CONSUMER TREATED EQUALLY WITH OTHER CUSTOMERS** – As we turn to SLIDE # 28, we need to make sure of this. This comes back to the information Ron shared regarding the ADA. Providing referral information is a key service among One Stop partners, but a disabled consumer has the right to select the partners he or she wishes to work with. In our example, the referral was not a one shot offer- the employment counselor reintroduced the possibility once there were some clear needed services that only VESID could provide. This sort of practical approach often works when the initial idea of working with an agency for the disabled may be rejected.

- **PARTNER AGENCY INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS AVAILABLE** – Having brochures around is another low key way to enable people to work their way to accepting linkages and referrals.

- **PARTNER REFFERALS OFFERED**- Obviously invaluable tools for this process are staff who have received cross-training from their One Stop partners, and local resource directories.

- **EMPLOYER JOB DESCRIPTIONS INCLUDE PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS** – As we turn to SLIDE #29, in many circumstances, we see that accommodations initially intended for people with disabilities end up benefiting the whole community—for example- ramps, curb cuts, larger print signage- the older we get as a society, the more helpful this is to us all. Similarly, an employer who is very specific about needing a 10th grade reading level and a 12th grade math level for his position often DOESN’T specify the physical demands of the work. One Stop Business services staff
can help employers and job applicants by discussing this aspect of the job order too.

- **CONSULTATION WITH VESID STAFF ON DISABILITY SPECIFIC ISSUES** - This is really the key to good interagency collaboration. Informal case conferencing to explore ideas, resources, approaches - this sort of brainstorming leads to consumers receiving the best possible package of service.

- **VESID ORIENTATION AND SERVICES AVAILABLE ON-SITE** - As I mentioned previously, the 15 VESID offices across the state have very different staffing levels and geographic responsibilities, so not every office has exactly the same on-site presence in the One Stops - but generally, we’re there, and we are very eager to share information and discuss resources.

- **SHARED SPONSORSHIP OF SOME CASES** - One of the things that has evolved in our “One Stop” lives is the idea that sponsorship of a particular consumer doesn’t have to be an ‘either/or” situation. Identifying a “lead counselor helps a lot in these cases.

- **SUPPORTS UNIQUE TO EACH FUNDING SOURCE COMBINED FOR TOTAL PACKAGE, INCLUDING JOB DEVELOPMENT** - As illustrated by SLIDE #30, often the package of services that the consumer needs can best be put together with a couple of agencies coordinating resources. Bringing in all the relevant partner resources maximizes outcomes.

In conclusion, I’d have to say that I think collaborating with the One Stops enables VESID to offer its consumers a much broader array of partner services, and enables the One Stops to draw on VESID’s rehabilitation expertise in a number of ways. While the whole Memorandum Of Understanding process has been a tortured nightmare, the actual day to day mutual service delivery has been a very positive experience for both our staff and our consumers.

JS - Thank you Susan and Ron so much for this overview of State and Federal Vocational Rehabilitation System. Unfortunately, we are running out of time and before we get to questions and answers I want to remind folks on SLIDE # 31 to email their questions regarding today’s topic to ac258@cornell.edu or by tolling 1-888-224-3272. That’s ac258@cornell.edu or 1-888-224-3272. Now, let’s take a couple of questions.
QUESTION and ANSWER PERIOD

AF - Well folks, that is all we have time for today and as you transition to SLIDE # 32, we want to thank you for taking the time today to be a part of this important distance education program and ask you to take two minutes to go online and complete the training evaluation form. You received an email from us that provided an Internet link to our e-evaluation. Simply follow the directions in the email and it will link you to an e-form on a secure website. Complete the form and hit submit and you are done! Individuals seeking a Certificate of Completion at the end of this series and/or Continuing Rehabilitation Counselor Credits will need to have a program evaluation form on file here in our offices, so please make sure to forward your evaluations to us today. I also want to encourage those of you after our call today that continue to have questions pertaining to how a person’s benefits are impacted by returning to work to call our toll free line for technical assistance 24/7. The number for toll free technical support pertaining to work incentives or to subscribe to the quarterly newsletter the Benefits Planner is 1-888-224-3272. Finally, for a copy of today’s transcript, please call our toll free number 1-888-224-3272 and our operators will be able to assist you.

We want to extend our sincere appreciation to you our listeners and learners during this Work Incentive Utilization Series. The response to this new certificate program was overwhelming and truly spoke to the need for further information on how to use available work incentives and systems to support informed choice and enhanced employment outcomes for people with disabilities. For those of you that completed the entire series and course requirements, certificates will be forwarded in approximately 30 business days to the address you provided when you registered.

On behalf of our presenters today, Susan, Ron, and Jim, our sponsors, Thomas Golden and myself, thanks for joining us and have a great afternoon!

1.) Re transition services - post secondary is too late to assist youth prepare, although junior year is mentioned typically VESID is not introduced till 2nd semester sr. year. Is there a way to advocate a closer link to the rehab knowledge starting at 14 to develop a work identity and the development of skills that are directly related to the prevention of handicapping conditions due to
Vocational Rehabilitation

the lack of skills and awareness these youth may have? (This is particularly evident with youth with emotional disability).

2.) Is there a way to assist students prepare for VESID eligibility when the school has not needed clear medical delineation of the disability (i.e. learning disability)?

Also related to this population is there a tolerance for the natural need to start and stop and start again when you look at the world of work and youth?

3.) Do the One Stops have an age requirement? in other words can youth use the One Stop for summer jobs, part time work and/or class room job search assistance?

4.) NYSDOL gave VESID TANF money to be used for innovative programming for TANF/VESID eligible consumers. However, many TANF people with disabilities are not eligible for VESID services because even though they qualify in terms of their functional disability - they do not yet have a "vocational goal" and/or went to see their counselor as a component of their Workfare requirement. After having had a frustrating experience trying to use LIVES funding to do Workfare employment programming, I am left wondering why - if the LIVES money is available for innovation - that standard VESID eligibility/procedure is applied? This as orientation, intake, application, assessments - can and often takes months

Since anyone (TANF eligible or otherwise) who meets VESID eligibility can be served with VESID's regular money, why have money (in the absence of ability to be used differently) go into LIVES?