For Americans with disabilities, employment is vital to independence, empowerment, and quality of life. During National Disability Employment Awareness Month, we recognize the many contributions citizens with disabilities make to our society, and we reaffirm our commitment to helping them achieve their full inclusion in our workforce.

George W. Bush
President
United States of America
October 3, 2003

Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers and Employment Outcomes Research

In his Proclamation on National Disability Employment Awareness Month, October 2003, President Bush continued:

In February 2001, I launched the New Freedom Initiative to address these challenges, to fulfill the promises of the ADA, and to move toward an America where all our citizens live and work with dignity and freedom. This comprehensive plan is helping Americans with disabilities learn and develop skills, engage in productive work, make choices about their daily lives, and participate fully in their communities.


In 1998, six employment-focused Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers (RRTCs) were funded by NIDRR to address employment issues related to policy, workplace supports, transition, community-based programs, and state employment service systems. Other RRTCs and other NIDRR projects are also funded with the research priority of “employment outcomes.” Goals of this research include sharing results so they may be utilized to improve the lives of people with disabilities.

Findings from NIDRR-funded research impact the areas of policy, direct service, decision-making, transition, advocacy, and more.

The NCDDR invited RRTCs with an employment focus to describe several of their most important research findings. We present brief overviews of significant outcomes and products, and how to follow up with NIDRR grantees for more in-depth information.

In this second “Employment Outcomes” issue of FOCUS, research overviews are presented from:

- Cornell University’s RRTC for Economic Research on Employment Policy for Persons with Disabilities;
- RRTC on Drugs and Disability (Wright State University School of Medicine);
- RTC on Community Rehabilitation Programs to Improve Employment Outcomes (University of Wisconsin-Stout);
- RRTC on Blindness and Low Vision (Mississippi State University); and
- National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports (University of Hawai’i at Manoa).
The Cornell University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (RRTC) for Economic Research on Employment Policy for Persons with Disabilities provides a coordinated research, training and dissemination effort to improve the understanding of policy makers and other stakeholders on the role of the economy, public policies, and other environmental factors on the employment and economic self-sufficiency of persons with disabilities. Some of the Cornell RRTC’s accomplishments from 2002-2003 include:

- In the Fall of 2003, the Upjohn Institute for Employment Research published *The Decline in Employment of People with Disabilities: A Policy Puzzle*, edited by David Stapleton and Richard Burkhauser. This volume documents the decline in the employment of working-age people with disabilities during the 1990s and investigates various hypotheses about why the decline occurred. The book includes findings from the RRTC projects in which RRTC staff:
  - compared trends in employment from multiple data sources;
  - assessed variation in employment trends across age, sex and education groups;
  - analyzed the effect of growing health care costs on employment trends;
  - analyzed the effect of changes in the labor market on employment trends; and
  - reviewed evidence about how changes in the Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income programs have affected employment trends.

Other contributors examine the extent to which changes in health conditions and the Americans with Disabilities Act have had an impact on employment trends. The volume is based on selected papers presented at a Cornell University RRTC policy conference held in October 2001 in Washington, D.C. For information on specific content or to order the volume, go to the Upjohn Institute Web site at http://www.upjohn.org/

- RRTC staff members are studying the extent to which youth and young adults with disabilities are making progress toward the goal of greater economic independence and more rewarding lives. Initial findings appear on the RRTC's Web site: http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/ped/dep/dep.html

- The RRTC is working with the Rehabilitation Services Administration to further promote the data sets from the Longitudinal Study of Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program (LSVRSP) conducted by Research Triangle Institute (RTI). A Web site was designed that provides access to study surveys, data collection instruments and codebooks, research published to date, an Information Exchange, and a Users’ Guide. Visit the LSVRSP Web site for further information: http://www.lsvrsp.org/ In addition, the RRTC currently offers a free two-to-three hour distance-learning workshop on how to utilize the LSVRSP Web site and data.

Submitted by Susanne Bruyère, Ph.D., Project Director, Cornell University School of Industrial and Labor Relations Extension Division, Program on Employment and Disability. The Rehabilitation Research and Training Center for Economic Research on Employment Policy for Persons with Disabilities is funded to Cornell University, in collaboration with the Urban Institute (Washington, D.C.) by the U.S. Department of Education, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), Grant #H133B980038. The opinions and findings reported do not necessarily represent the interpretations or opinions of NIDRR or the U.S. Department of Education. Further information about the Cornell RRTC or about these specific activities can be obtained by contacting Dr. Bruyère by e-mail smb23@cornell.edu or phone 607-255-9536
The RRTC on Drugs and Disability is designed to improve vocational rehabilitation outcomes for individuals who abuse substances. It initiated operations in 1993 as part of the Substance Abuse Resources and Disability Issues (SARDI) Program, housed in the Department of Community Health in the Wright State University’s School of Medicine. The RRTC conducts epidemiological and evaluative research studies of substance abuse and substance abuse services for consumers of state vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs and other people with disabilities.

INVESTIGATION OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE, DISABILITY, AND VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

The RRTC on Drugs and Disability collected epidemiological data as part of two studies (carried out in 1995 and 2000) that focused upon increasing understanding of how alcohol and other drug (AOD) use is related to other characteristics of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) consumers with co-existing disabilities, as well as whether it impacts the outcomes they realize from their participation in rehabilitation. A total of 10 state VR agencies participated in these studies. The results from those two studies, which involved samples of 1,876 and 1,295 individuals, respectively, indicated the following:

• While overall AOD usage rates among VR consumers appear to be relatively stable over the latter half of the 90’s, illicit drug use by VR consumers was significantly higher than that of the general population. Alcohol use by VR consumers was slightly lower than that reported in the National Household Drug Survey for the general population of adults.

• Lifetime usage of both illicit drugs and alcohol by VR consumers were found to be significantly related to a number of personal, psychological variables (e.g., personal risk-taking behavior, self concept, personal anger/temper, perception that AOD use is justified due to one’s disability, perceived restrictiveness of disability, and satisfaction with life), as well as to a number of background characteristics (e.g., age, total family income, “best friend drinks,” “family has drug/alcohol problems,” “best friend uses drugs,” and marital status).

• While employment status was shown to improve significantly (i.e., from entry into VR to closure) for VR consumers, those improvements were not shown to differ between consumers with AOD problems and consumers who were not reported to have such problems. A number of factors appear to influence the disposition of VR rehabilitation when an individual abuses alcohol or drugs.

• VR counselors are far more likely to ask alcohol and drug-related questions if this condition is identified as the reason the person is seeking rehabilitation. VR counselors do not routinely screen for hidden AOD problems among consumers, although approximately one quarter of all consumers identify themselves as “in recovery” from AOD abuse. Data indicate that persons with a disability of “chemical dependency” experience persisting functional impairments extending beyond when the individual attains sobriety.

Substance Abuse Among Consumers of Vocational Rehabilitation Services: Summary of an Epidemiology Study  
http://www.med.wright.edu/citar/sardi/epidem_study.html

INFLUENCES OF SPECIALIZED REHABILITATION PROGRAMS ON EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES FOR PERSONS WITH SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND CO-EXISTING DISABILITIES

One of the specialized rehabilitation programs evaluated is the Consumer Advocacy Model (CAM) treatment program, which specifically serves persons with substance use disorders and severe co-existing disabilities. The CAM program, operated in conjunction with the RRTC on Drugs and Disability, involves outpatient treatment focused upon provision of extensive case management services, interpersonal skills enhancement, as well as a focus on job/vocational services. An analysis of outcome data for the roughly 650 consumers served by CAM staff over a five-year period (1997 to 2001) yielded the following:

• A statistically significant decrease in consumers’ use of their substance of choice was observed over the course of treatment.

• Several legal and medical gains were actualized through treatment, such as significant decreases in the numbers of arrests, hospital admissions, psychiatric hospitalizations, and outpatient visits for medical problems.
• Significantly more consumers were living in their own apartments/homes after participating in CAM than at admission. Approximately 10 percent of the CAM census was homeless at intake.

• Significantly more consumers were employed after participating in the CAM Program than before (approximately 24 percent employed at closure). Consumers who were more intensively involved in the Program were significantly more likely to be employed at closure than were those consumers who were more minimally involved.

CAM, the Consumer Advocacy Model Program
http://www.med.wright.edu/citar/sardi/cam.html

Barriers to Employment for Individuals with HIV/AIDS: Alcohol and Drug Use as a Contributing Factor
An in-depth, qualitative study was conducted by the RRTC, utilizing iterative interviews with 51 persons living with HIV/AIDS throughout Ohio in 2000-2001. Subsequent interviews also solicited information from VR counselors. Seventy-four percent of the respondents were male, 59 percent were ethnic minorities, 82.4 percent had multiple disabilities, and approximately 53 percent were symptomatic of AIDS (e.g., CD4 cell count < 200 cells/ul). Forty-one of the respondents were technically classified as “unemployed” due to seasonal or “under the table” work to avoid loss of benefits. Thirty-five respondents reported having quit their jobs since being diagnosed with HIV/AIDS. Several respondents believed that they were forced out of their jobs because of their HIV status. Respondents cited fatigue, fear of being exposed to illness, discrimination, need for new training, disclosure issues, potential loss of benefits, and a need for flexible work hours as major barriers to employment.

Substance abuse was determined to be one of several factors adversely impacting employment and quality of life among study respondents. Sixty-three percent of the respondents scored higher than five on the short version of the Michigan Alcoholism Screening Test (M.A.S.T.), indicating probable alcohol dependence. However, employment outcomes and employability ratings between respondents reporting alcohol and other drug (AOD) use and those respondents reporting no AOD use were comparable. The majority of persons with HIV/AIDS in this study experienced multiple functional barriers, not just HIV. In fact, high viral titer or low CD4 counts did not correlate significantly with any of the substance use, employment, or vocational rehabilitation variables in this study. In fact, HIV often appeared to be less of a barrier to employment than other factors (e.g., mental health, post-traumatic stress disorder, substance use disorder, victimization, incarceration).

The results suggest that persons with HIV/AIDS who are interested in becoming employed face multiple and often severe personal, psychological, and physical barriers to this goal. Interview data suggest that for many persons HIV is but one manifestation of a lifestyle with multiple, severe stressors. Persons with HIV face numerous functional barriers to employment that include societal, medical, and psychological barriers.

Double Jeopardy: HIV and Disability
http://www.med.wright.edu/citar/sardi/online_double_jeopardy.html

Other Selected Reports
http://www.med.wright.edu/citar/sardi/rtc_conference.html

Work as a Critical Component of Recovery
http://www.med.wright.edu/citar/sardi/workAndRecovery.html

Submitted by Dennis Moore, Ed.D., Principal Investigator and Director of the RRTC on Drugs and Disability. The opinions and findings reported do not necessarily represent the interpretations or opinions of NIDRR or the U.S. Department of Education. The research was supported in part by Grant #H133B970018 from NIDRR to the Wright State University’s School of Medicine, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Drugs and Disability. For further information or assistance, please contact the Center at 937-775-1484 (Voice/TTY), sardi@wright.edu or http://www.med.wright.edu/citar/sardi/rtc.html
Research and Training Center (RTC) on Community Rehabilitation Programs to Improve Employment Outcomes
University of Wisconsin-Stout

The goals of this program are to define, promote, and help community-based rehabilitation programs (CRPs) provide employment-related services that demonstrate important employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Findings from four recently completed studies are summarized. Additional information on each is available at the RTC's Web site: http://www.rtc.uwstout.edu/

CORE COMPONENTS OF EFFECTIVE SERVICES PROVIDED BY COMMUNITY-BASED REHABILITATION PROGRAMS IDENTIFIED
A national study conducted in cooperation with NISH (formerly the National Industries for the Severely Handicapped), CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities), Goodwill, and Easter Seals to identify consistencies in services and experiences of individuals with disabilities or other barriers to achieve employment. Based upon data from 932 consumers at 65 CRPs, 10 service components were identified that appear to describe how clients are served in CRPs:

- Intake and orientation to services;
- Vocational planning and actions to achieve employment;
- Supports to remain in workforce;
- Supports for community participation;
- Job training and supports;
- Job acquisition or job search and placement;
- Training to acquire and keep job: Soft and hard skills training;
- Case management and supports coordination;
- Individual and in-community supports; and
- Direct supports to ensure job retention.

These 10 core components were found to be applied consistently with clients with employment goals referred by state vocational rehabilitation, developmental disabilities, and mental health, with individual adaptations.


PREFERRED AND DESIRED OUTCOMES FROM REHABILITATION PROGRAMS GO BEYOND EMPLOYMENT
Advocates, providers, and funders agree that outcomes from CRP vocational services go beyond just employment. A series of studies with the Employment Outcomes Instrument (EOI) has documented the importance of non-vocational outcomes important to sustaining a person in the community as well as in employment. The EOI has now been validated with approximately 190 consumers at 14 sites providing status measures for vocational (employment, hours, earnings, longevity), benefits (SSI/SSDI, cash, non-cash subsidies, job benefits, characteristics of job, work environment), service satisfaction (choice, quality, outcomes), residential status, and quality of life (community participation, volunteer and educational activities, employment satisfaction, access to needed supports).


CONSUMERS REPORT MODERATE TO HIGH LEVELS OF CHOICE IN SERVICES AND OUTCOMES
The relationships between consumer choice, satisfaction with services, and satisfaction with outcomes as perceived by consumers were examined and compared with staff perceptions of consumer involvement in participatory planning activities. The 950 consumers reported moderate to high levels of choice in services and employment goals. Consumer perceptions of informed choice were significantly related to greater satisfaction with services received and outcomes attained. People with greater functional limitations...
perceived significantly lower levels of informed choice. Staff perceptions of participatory planning were comparable to consumer perceptions.


CRPs are a Substantial Resource Both Within Their Communities and Nationally

CRPs represent a major community employment-related resource supporting public and private sector efforts to re-engage people with disabilities into employment, community, and equal economic participation. Recent research to document these organizations provides estimates of the extent to which CRPs are serving adults, youth, social security beneficiaries, and other persons with disabilities. There are in excess of 8,100 provider organizations nationally, found in virtually every state and territory, and often operating through multiple sites in their communities.

A typical reporting CRP has 71.2 full-time equivalent staff, average annual revenue of $7.3 million and vocational revenue of $3.1 million, to serve approximately 1,400 individuals per year, of whom 800 have disabilities. CRPs will provide three or more vocationally oriented services to achieve an employment outcome (e.g., assessment, employment, training, placement), frequently in combination with supporting services to maintain employment or community participation (e.g., case management, residential, day activity). Conservative estimates put the total numbers of individuals with disabilities served in employment-related services from VR, DD, MH, and SSA at around 1,000,000 annually.


Submitted by Fred Menz, Ph.D., Project Director. The opinions and findings reported do not necessarily represent the interpretations or opinions of the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) or the U.S. Department of Education. The research was supported in part by Grant #H133B980040 from NIDRR to the University of Wisconsin-Stout, RTC on Community Rehabilitation Programs to Improve Employment Outcomes. For further information or assistance, please contact the Center at 715-232-1389 (Voice), 715-232-5025 (TTY), rtc@uwstout.edu, or visit the RTC’s Web site: http://www rtc uwstout edu/
prior to placement; coordinating with the information technology personnel at the job site; and acquiring equipment in a timely manner. Resolving equipment problems prior to placement can alleviate this barrier.

Transportation options are an ongoing barrier to employment that can be addressed through multi-level intervention. Rehabilitation providers support relocating consumers willing to move to areas with more accessible transportation options. Consumers want the rehabilitation provider to be more active in negotiating transportation arrangements. Common solutions include riding with coworkers, family members, retired persons for fee, or volunteers identified through civic or church groups. Some rehabilitation providers have been successful in obtaining grant funds to set up transportation systems while others have advocated for changes in existing transportation systems to better serve consumers with visual disabilities. One consumer group, with the assistance of a donor, established and operates a voucher system to subsidize cab fare for persons with visual disabilities in their metro area.

Use of job coaches, on-the-job training programs, and temporary or summer employment to educate consumers about the workplace and fine-tune professional behavior on the job was recommended. Employers echo these sentiments, and suggest job mentors and formal/structured programs that teach business social skills. Consumer preparation prior to employment is recognized as important by all, with employers stressing knowledge of the corporate culture and skill development as important factors.

A series of monographs about overcoming barriers to employment for persons who are blind/severely visually impaired are available through the RRTC on Blindness and Low Vision at Mississippi State University. Executive summaries are available for downloading at the Center’s Web site: [http://www.blind.msstate.edu/](http://www.blind.msstate.edu/)

Submitted by Adele Crudden, Ph.D., Research Scientist. For additional information, contact Dr. Crudden: crudden@ra.msstate.edu Development of this document was supported in part by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Blindness and Low Vision, Grant #H133B60001 from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC. Opinions expressed in this document are not necessarily those of the granting agency. Mississippi State University does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, age, sex, national origin, veteran status, or disability.

The National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports (NCSMES) is a Rehabilitation Research and Training Center funded by NIDRR. The NCSMES Web site [http://www.rrtc.hawaii.edu/](http://www.rrtc.hawaii.edu/) describes “The vision of the National Center is to move beyond what has and has not worked in the past, toward a new system of educational supports for people with disabilities in the 21st century. Postsecondary programs of the future must foster high expectations, build self-confidence, and develop an understanding of strengths and weaknesses of all students. All teachers, support persons, and agency providers must focus upon the use of individualized supports and technology to meet each student’s needs and promote a successful transition to a chosen career.”

The NCSMES is currently collaborating on seven projects with the following educational institutions across the United States:

- University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration;
- Children’s Hospital/University of Massachusetts Boston/Institute on Community Inclusion;
- The Ohio State University, Nisonger Center for Disabilities;
- Virginia Commonwealth University, VCU-RRTC;
- University of Washington, DO-IT Project; and
- Holt High School, Holt, Michigan, Bridges

Several collaborations have yielded information and results that contribute to the knowledge about postsecondary education for students with disabilities.

**LONGITUDINAL ANALYSIS OF THE EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WITH POSTSECONDARY SUPPORT SERVICE SYSTEMS: CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE SUPPORT SYSTEMS (STUDY #2) UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA**

This was a secondary analysis of a national survey. Findings from this study indicate a greater capacity of four-year public institutions to provide supports and services for students with disabilities. Three domains were examined in the longitudinal study:

1. **How does support service capacity impact consumer perceptions of access?**
2. What characteristics are likely to result in consumer access satisfaction?
3. What supports are considered most effective in terms of carryover to subsequent employment?

For more information about this study, visit the RRTC’s Web site: http://www.rrtc.hawaii.edu/products/phases/phase2_02.asp?studyNumber=2


TRENDS IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION SERVICES IN THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SYSTEM FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES (STUDY #5) UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

This study examines trends in the provision of postsecondary supports and education-related services from the state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) System. Analysis revealed that about 37 percent of people with disabilities in the VR system participated in postsecondary education.

For more information about this study, visit the RRTC’s Web site: http://www.rrtc.hawaii.edu/products/phases/phase2_02.asp?studyNumber=5


THE EFFECTS OF POSTSECONDARY SETTINGS ON EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES AND TECHNOLOGICAL SUPPORTS TRANSFER (STUDY #22) THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY, NISONGER CENTER FOR DISABILITIES

The effects of postsecondary supports and services were studied and compared to employment outcomes and transfer of technological supports. This study utilized a survey that examines transference of assistive technology between schools and the workplace. One surprising finding was the large number of postsecondary education students with disabilities who self-identified for the first time after secondary education.

For more information about this study, visit the RRTC’s Web site: http://www.rrtc.hawaii.edu/products/phases/phase2_02.asp?studyNumber=22

Sharpe, M. N. Project Grad: Preliminary analysis. Phase II Findings Brief #22 (MS#059b(2)-H02). Honolulu: National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports.


Submitted by Teresa Whelley, Ed.D., Research Coordinator, National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports. For additional information, contact Dr. Whelley by email: Teresa.Whelley@cds.hawaii.edu or call 808-956-9142. These reports were produced by the National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center, at the Center on Disability Studies at University of Hawai`i, under Grant #H133B980043. The opinions contained in this publication are those of the grantee and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of Education.

Available online: http://www.ncddr.org/du/products/focus/focus7/

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The NCDDR assists, through information and technical assistance, NIDRR grantees with identifying and crafting dissemination strategies. These strategies are designed to meet the needs of a grantee’s unique target audience. NCDDR also analyzes and reports on dissemination trends relevant to disability research.

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