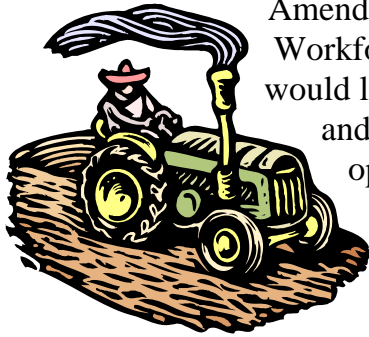


# Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) General Information

VR helps people with disabilities get jobs and live independently in the community. Rehabilitation counselors and blind/low vision specialists in ten field offices across the state work directly with consumers to provide individual services. Vocational Rehabilitation operates under the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.

Under the Rehabilitation Act, federal grants are awarded to assist states in operating a comprehensive vocational rehabilitation program. This program provides VR services to eligible people with disabilities, consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, and abilities, so that each person may prepare for and engage in gainful employment.



Amended in 1998, the Rehabilitation Act is now a part of the Workforce Investment System. Congress hoped this linkage would lead to close cooperation and coordination between the VR and workforce systems which in turn would lead to increased opportunities for training and higher quality employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

## General Highlights

- Typically Vocational Rehabilitation serves about 8,000 Montanans with disabilities. About 800-900 of these consumers find jobs.
- The total annual earnings of Montanans who are rehabilitated each year are about \$11 million.
- The average wage of a consumer who is employed is over \$11 per hour.
- The average successfully employed consumer receives VR services for about 2 years.

## FY 2010 Highlights

In FY 2010, Montana VR served 8,508 eligible Montanans with disabilities.

- 4,573 of these Montanans received services under an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).
  - 716 went to work (Note: VR counts a person as “working” only after they have been employed for at least 90 days)
  - 993 dropped out after they started on their employment plan for a variety of reasons—moved out of the area, disability became more significant, death, no longer interested in VR services, etc.
  - 2,864 continued with Vocational Rehabilitation in FY 2011.
- The total annual earnings of Montanans who were successfully employed last year were \$11.3 million.
- The average hourly wage was \$11.09.



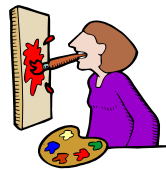
## Cost effectiveness

- National statistics show that for every dollar invested in the VR program, about ten dollars are returned to the economy in the form of higher wages.
- Montana statistics indicate that for every dollar spent, over six dollars are returned to the economy. One reason for the difference in these numbers is the lower pay scales in Montana.

## Eligibility criteria

You are eligible for VR services if:

1. you have a physical or mental disability, and
2. the disability prevents you from getting or keeping a job, and
3. you want to work and you need VR services to help you obtain or keep a job.



## Primary Disability

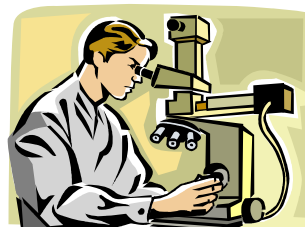
VR serves people with any disability. About 38% of our VR consumers have some type of physical disability such as paraplegia, quadriplegia, multiple sclerosis etc. About 51% of VR consumers have some type of mental disability such as a mental illness or a developmental disability. The other 11% of our consumers have a sensory disability---visual or hearing.

## Where are we located?

- We have 98 employees (bodies, not FTE) who are located in offices across the state.
- Most (86%) of our staff provide direct services to consumers in field offices. These staff include counselors, visual specialists, and support staff.
- Our 10 field offices are located in Missoula, Kalispell, Hamilton, Butte, Bozeman, Helena, Great Falls, Havre, Billings, and Miles City.
- Our four Blind/Low Vision locations in Missoula, Butte, Great Falls, and Billings each house a team composed of a counselor, rehabilitation teacher, and an orientation and mobility specialist. The staff work directly with blind and visually impaired consumers, helping them to learn to work and live independently in their communities.

## What services are provided?

- Guidance and counseling in the selection of a vocational goal
- Assessment of needs to overcome disability impediments in achieving work and independence
- Physical and mental restoration services
- Adaptive equipment (adapted computer; hand driving controls; etc.)
- Training and training materials (university, vo-tech, adult education, on-the-job training)
- Transportation related to other VR services
- Interpreter services for persons who are deaf
- Reader services for persons who are blind
- Orientation and mobility instruction (visually impaired)
- Services to assist students with disabilities transition from school to work
- Job placement services
- Any service necessary to get someone to work
- Technical assistance for employers



## The Rehabilitation Process

- A VR counselor is assigned to each eligible individual
- The counselor gathers as much information as possible about the individual's work history, education and training, abilities and interests, rehabilitation needs, and possible career goals.
- Together the counselor and the individual develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) which identifies the individual's long-term vocational goals.
- The IPE also lists the steps necessary to achieve the individual's goals, the services required to help the individual reach those goals, and evaluation criteria used to determine whether goals have been achieved.
- The IPE also contains a description of how the individual was involved in

choosing among alternative goals, objectives, services, and service providers.

- The VR counselor provides some services directly to the eligible individual and arranges for and/or purchases other services from providers in the community.

### **Does the individual ever have to pay for VR services?**

Montana state law requires that consumers must help pay for their VR services if they are able to. Since most VR consumers are not employed, they generally do not have resources to pay for all of their services. Federal law requires that VR provide certain services regardless of the individual's ability to pay. These services include:

- assessments to determine eligibility and VR needs
- vocational counseling, guidance, and referral services
- job placement services
- rehabilitation technology

### **Other services we offer**

VR's main focus is Section 110 (named after Section 110 in the federal Rehabilitation Act). Other programs include Independent Living, Supported Employment, Extended Employment, Older Blind Services, Visual Services Medical, and Business Enterprise Program. In addition, the Montana Telecommunications Access Program is housed in the Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

### **Additional information**

1. In addition to the “work” program described above, Vocational Rehabilitation serves Montanans with disabilities in the Independent Living Program (1,421 consumers), Montana Telecommunications Access Program (802 consumers), Older Blind Program (631 consumers), Extended Employment Program (306 consumers), Visual Medical Program (207 consumers), Montana Youth Leadership Forum (7/2010 = 15 youth) and Business Enterprise Program (3 vending routes).
2. Each counselor works with about 110 active cases at a time.
3. The average consumer who becomes successfully employed receives VR services for about two years. The purpose of Vocational Rehabilitation is to assist people in obtaining employment so that they can work and live independently without VR services.
4. The major funding source is Section 110 with a matching rate of 78.7% federal and 21.3% state. In addition, VR has some areas which are 100% federal

funds (Supported Employment) and some which are 100% general fund (Extended Employment, Visual Medical).

5. VR purchases goods and services from about 2,000 vendors. These vendors include universities, vo-techs, schools, community rehabilitation programs such as Helena Industries, private businesses and stores, adaptive equipment suppliers, bus companies, and medical providers.
6. VR Counselors have master's degrees in rehabilitation counseling as well as other specialized training in disability issues.

# CONSUMER SUCCESS STORIES

## Success Story 1

When Paul\* first applied for services, he was 48 years old and had just moved to Montana from California. He had contacted the Mental Health Center, was receiving services, and now wanted to go to work. He had not worked in four years. He applied for VR services based on a long history of mental illness.

Paul had worked most of his adult life until 1996. He was very good at getting jobs but simply could not keep them. After years of struggling and being frustrated, he realized his employment problems had a lot to do with his mental illness, so eventually he went on Social Security disability.

When Paul came to VR, he was frustrated, tired of not having enough income, and he had a strong desire to return to work. After some counseling and guidance, career exploration, and a community assessment, Paul decided that he wanted to build on his interest in computers. He and his counselor agreed that a career in this field would give him the best chance of maintaining employment. It was an area in which he had a strong interest, some experience, limited skills, and it appeared to be the most compatible with his disability and the limitations imposed by his symptoms. He developed a vocational plan with computer technician as his goal.

VR was able to fund Paul in training that would give him the certifications he needed to work as a computer technician. VR also gave him the services of a placement specialist who helped him with his job search and eventually assisted him in securing a position as a computer technician. The job he accepted allowed him to work independently, provided him enough income to get off of Social Security benefits, and allowed him the flexibility to maintain his mental health program.

## Success Story 2

Chris\* applied for services from Montana Vocational Rehabilitation in November 2002. He had been diagnosed with anxiety and depression significant enough that it had resulted in hospitalizations.

Chris expressed the desire to reach several goals, both vocational and personal. Vocationally he wanted to become a counselor, working with children. His personal goals were to set a good example for his own children; specifically, he wanted his children see him successfully employed by Christmas of 2005.

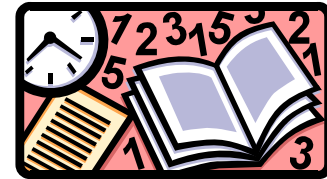
While his initial goal was to work with children, later in the process we agreed to change his long-term vocational goal to Chemical Dependency Counselor. Chris made this change because he felt he had valued skills and insights to bring to that occupation. He was also aware that the length of that curriculum is shorter and this

change would enable him to work sooner.

Chris worked diligently to complete his training and graduated in May of 2005; he was hired as a Chemical Dependency Counselor in June, 2005.

### **Success Story 3**

Darla\* is a 35 year-old married woman and mother of four. She came to Vocational Rehabilitation (Blind and Low Vision Services) inquiring about the newly formed Montana Business Enterprise Program for vendors, and she expressed a genuine interest to become involved. At the time of her application, Darla owned and operated a registered daycare business from her home. She was told by State of Montana authorities that they could no longer license her as a daycare provider should her vision get worse. Additionally, her ophthalmologist told her that she had to stop driving due to advancing Retinitis



Pigmentosa. Darla and her VR counselor wrote an employment plan to include services such as evaluation and assessment, low vision adaptation and assistive technology, Business Enterprise vendor training, and on-the-job training. Darla maintains her position as a licensed Business Enterprise Program vendor in her community, earning wages of \$480 per week, at 40 hours per week. Most recently, she was promoted to Training and Business/Accounting Manager.

### **Success Story 4**

Bill\* was a man who initially said, “No one will hire me”. He had the look of a man that really believed that. Bill had residuals of cancer, which was not yet in remission. He admitted that his grooming and cleanliness were an issue because “Being out in the sticks so much I got out of the habit of taking a bath”. When VR tried to take a shared approach to Bill’s rehabilitation with another agency they were told “We don’t want to pick him up. He is never going to work.” When Bill reached the point of vocational planning, he had two ideas for employment. The first was to play a guitar in a band. “Do you play a guitar”, asked the counselor. “No”, said Bill, “but I always thought it would be fun, and I could put this sagebrush in my rearview



mirror”. Bill’s second idea was to build guns. He and his counselor talked about his hobbies of fishing, hunting, shooting and trapping. Bill, who had never used a computer, received a little training in web searching from the VR counselor and from Job Service, so he began diligently looking at gunsmith schools and gun related jobs; and gradually his thoughts moved away from his first musical goal. The rehabilitation of Bill was truly a team effort between Bill, Montana Vocational Rehabilitation and Montana Job Service. For example, Bill felt his mail was being taken from his box, so Job Service allowed him to receive his mail at their office, and they assisted him with his internet searches and computer skill development. Vocational Rehabilitation assisted him with enlarging photos of guns he had built and finished. VR also helped him create professional letters and provided postage to send his new portfolio to several gun

makers in Montana and nationwide. Bill cooperated fully, and worked hard to contact as many gun manufactures as he could afford. He kept careful records, including a job search notebook. Bill was hired at a Montana manufacturing plant and earns over eleven dollars an hour.

### **Success Story 5**

Ross\* is an individual with a severe hearing disability, and he communicates only with sign language. In order to move toward an appropriate work goal, Ross participated in a number of assessments, including a vocational evaluation and a functional capacity evaluation. Ross then worked with an employment specialist at a facility offering job finding activities. After a few months of job searching, Ross found a job at Lowe's Hardware. Lowe's had not officially opened yet, but after being interviewed, Ross was offered a job working in inventory. The employment specialist/interpreter worked with Lowe's employees and Ross during his training to establish ways for effective communication including a vibrating pager system, information to employees on common sign language such as the alphabet and emergency signs, and assisting with general interpretation of job duties and communication. Many of Ross' coworkers have now learned minimal signing in order to communicate with him, and one of his coworker's signs due to having a relative who is deaf, providing a form of natural support for Ross. Ross' case was closed as successfully employed after he reported that he is enjoying his job and planning to apply for full-time employment. He currently works about 20 hours a week at \$9.01/hour with part-time insurance benefits.



\* Vocational Rehabilitation is always concerned about individual confidentiality and privacy. Names have been changed to protect the individuals with disabilities.