

# PHILOSOPHY & HISTORY OF THE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

The first federal vocational rehabilitation (VR) program known as the Soldier's Rehabilitation Act became law in 1918. The Smith Fess Act passed in 1920 extended VR services and programs to civilians with disabilities. In 1935, the Social Security Act established the federal state vocational rehabilitation program as a permanent program that could be terminated only by an Act of Congress.

The 1947 Montana Legislature created the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation of the State Board of Education, which was responsible for providing VR services to the physically and mentally disabled and for determining eligibility for Social Security disability benefits and supplemental income payments.

The 1965 Amendments eliminated "economic need" as a prerequisite for the provision of any vocational rehabilitation services. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was called the "billion dollar program" because the federal government provided \$650 and \$680 million dollars for 1974 & 1975 as an act of commitment to rehabilitation.

The 1978 Amendments further expanded the emphasis on serving the severely disabled. There wasn't funding available but the establishment of an independent living rehabilitation program for those who were disabled but without work potential would be brought to independent living status. This is important because it was the basis for forming the Independent Living movement in Montana.

The Client Assistance Program (CAP) was mandated in the 1984 Amendments to advocate for VR clients. Programs providing IL services with funds from the Rehab Act are mandated to notify consumers of CAP services.

The Amendments of 1992 were guided by the presumption of ability that gave the opportunity to a person with a severe disability the supports to become employable. Informed choice was included for potential employment outcomes that result in integration and inclusion in the community.

With passage of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, the Rehabilitation Act, which had previously been a stand-alone act, was now incorporated as Title IV of the Workforce Investment Act. The 1998 Amendments, presumed individuals with disabilities can benefit in terms of an employment outcome from VR Services unless the DSU can demonstrate by clear and convincing evidence that such individual cannot gain an employment outcome due to severity of the disability of the individual.

The Individualized Written Rehabilitation Program was changed to the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) and informed choice was expanded. The consumer now had the right to select an employment outcome, specific VR Services, who and how the services would be provided.