

Employing the Talents of Americans with disAbilities:

*Results from
Business-Vocational Rehabilitation
Partnerships*



Employing the Talents of Americans with disabilities: Facts, Figures, and Results

“People with disabilities want to be employed, educated, and participating citizens living in the community. In today’s global new economy, America must be able to draw on the talents and creativity of all its citizens.”

--President Bush: “Fulfilling America’s Promise to Americans with Disabilities”

FACTS

Americans with Disabilities

People with disabilities have multiple barriers to living independently in our communities and being gainfully employed in careers. Barriers often exist in relationship to communication, transportation, access, housing, skill assessment, career planning, training and a variety of health issues, including mental health supports.

- There are an estimated 54 million individuals with disabilities in the U.S., roughly 20 percent of the population. Nearly half of these individuals have a significant or multiple disabilities.
- A majority of people acquire or develop disabilities later in life. As people survive medical traumas, illness or accidents and the population ages, disability is impacting an increasing number of Americans and their families. This growing population includes veterans with disabilities. Disability crosses all ethnic and cultural communities in our country.
- One out of five adults with disabilities has not graduated from high school, compared to less than one of ten adults without disabilities.
- Americans with disabilities are poorer and more likely to be unemployed than those without disabilities.
- Unemployment rate for working-age adults with disabilities has remained near 70 percent for several years.

Supporting the Careers and Lifelong Learning of Individuals with Disabilities

Vocational Rehabilitation is not duplicative of any other program. Though they partner with the One-Stops throughout the country, that collaboration occurs after the VR program has prepared the person for the workplace.

- One-stops offer support in connecting to job openings, much of the focus is on high demand jobs.
- The VR system focuses on career development:
 - A comprehensive and holistic yet individualized planning process...
 - understanding that the barriers presented by a disabling condition vary from person to person and often require multiple services prior to a person entering the workforce;
 - individually tailored services to support the success of both the employee and the employer long after hire;
 - a successful, comprehensive approach unique to the VR system
 - There is a customized approach to matching qualified VR consumers with employers.



RESULTS

BUSINESS PARTNERSHIPS

Businesses value the long-term partnerships that have been developed with public Vocational Rehabilitation programs throughout the country. At the 2004 National Employment Conference in Washington, D.C., thirty-two businesses sponsored representatives from their companies to participate in strategy sessions designed to improve the employment of people with disabilities. Those companies included the following VR business partners:

AirTran Airways	National Bank of Commerce
American Red Cross	Oklahoma One-Call System, Inc.
Bridges, Inc.	On Our Own
Cellular One / Western Wireless	Principal Financial Group
CVS/Pharmacy	Raytheon Company
GEICO	Safeway, Inc.
General Motors, Inc.	Social Security Administration
InfoUSA	SouthTrust Bank
Intel	Starbucks Coffee Company
The Kennedy Center	State of Delaware
Lenske's Clamping Tools, Inc.	SunTrust Bank
Manpower, Inc.	United States Army
Marriott, Inc.	U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Motor World	University of Alabama at Birmingham
Miami University	Washington Mutual
Microsoft Corp.	West Corporation

Some of their comments about the business-VR partnership follow:

Beth Butler, SouthTrust/Wachovia Bank

"We have budget restraints... and bottom lines to talk about...and when you're in business it's all about the bottom line. The services and resources that cost us nothing that VR provides to us are so valuable to our company in achieving this bottom line."

Bob Foley, Raytheon Company

"The impact Vocational Rehabilitation has had not only on the defense and aerospace industry, but also in partnerships with Raytheon, has been mutually beneficial. We have had numerous employees who have come on board who have provided a wealth of knowledge and skills that we would not have had access to through career fairs or opportunities on the web."

Vicki Winn, Cellular One/Western Wireless

"Through our partnership with Vocational Rehabilitation, we're ensured that the people we hire meet our needs as a business. VR makes it a point to understand our business and our culture. They understand what we're looking for and they stand by us when they make a placement."

Debra Russell, Starbucks

"The most important thing for Starbucks is a relationship. That's what Vocational Rehabilitation has built with us. It was a new opportunity for us to bring in individuals with challenges, both physically and cognitively, and we were unsure as to how to proceed. That's where the relationship with VR helped."

Calvin Lyons, Washington Mutual Bank, Inc.

"We firmly believe that a company's strength lies in its ability to mirror the community that it serves. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation helps us achieve this goal by providing well qualified employees."



CONSUMER PARTNERSHIPS

Beth, Visually Impaired

After assessment, planning and identification of special technology needs by VR, Beth was assisted by in attainment of her college degree, accessing needed technology through VR. From there Beth acquired her law degree and is now a corporate banking compliance attorney helping the company expand its diversity initiatives nationally through linkages with the VR program.

John, Deaf

Raised in a rural agriculture community, John's high school counselor advised him that his only career option was that of an apple orchard hand. He left his hometown with "a suitcase in one hand and \$340/ month Social Security (SSI) check in the other". He connected with the public VR program and through proper assessment, counseling and guidance, tuition assistance for college education, mentoring and internships, he entered into gainful employment commensurate with his abilities and career aspirations. He is currently in his 22nd year of professional employment.

Matt, Quadriplegic with Traumatic Brain Injury

At age 39, Matt had an accident that left him a quadriplegic with a traumatic brain injury. As a former member of the Coast Guard and owner of a small business with a one-year old daughter, life changed dramatically for Matt. Medical staff advised him to plan for a life in a nursing home. Matt chose to return home, raise his daughter, and re-enter the workforce, to be an independent and contributing member of his community. He connected with VR to create a plan that would move him home. With the support of VR and his family, Matt is succeeding in a community college program and lives independently with his 8-year old daughter. VR provided Matt with a variety of assistive technology and personal support to accomplish his desire for independence and self-sufficiency.

Corey, Amputee

While serving in Iraq, Cory recently lost his leg in an explosion. Upon returning home he wished to accept the job offer he'd received prior to going to Iraq but was no longer physically able to perform the job tasks safely. His employer already had a working relationship with VR and, through them and their partnership with the Veterans Administration Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment program, Corey is in the process of being comprehensively assessed and accommodated for employment with this company while being supported in completion of his college degree.

Laura, Developmentally Disabled

Unable to maintain employment without special long-term supports, Laura was provided traditional Vocational Rehabilitation services to identify her aptitudes and interests while addressing her special needs. Afterwards, she was linked with an established business partner of the VR program for a "place and train" supported employment program with a job coach who helped her achieve her dream of working with other people in a video and DVD store.

Michael, Learning Disabled

Unable to read due to a significant learning disability, Michael was assisted by VR while in high school with in-school accommodations and a VR school-based job coach as he achieved certification in his chosen career tech field of brick masonry. Although he feared he would never work due to his disability, he is not only competitively employed with a major home improvement store but he was recently awarded "Employee of the Month" with glowing praise from his supervisor.

VR professionals and their corporate partners prepared this document for use by business with members of Congress. This booklet is designed to highlight the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in the workforce due to the effective partnerships between business and the public Vocational Rehabilitation program. Special thanks to our business partners at Western Wireless, T-Mobile, South Trust/ Wachovia Bank, Microsoft, CVS/Pharmacy and the Hyatt and our colleagues at the National Rehabilitation Association, the Council of Administrators in Native American Rehabilitation (CANAR) and the National Council on Disability (NCD).

