

Providing WIPA Services to Veterans with Disabilities Part 1

Virginia Commonwealth
University
WIPA NTC

Why the current emphasis on serving veterans?

Myth: Veterans with disabilities receive military retirement or VA benefits instead of SSA disability benefits, so they aren't eligible for WIPA services.

Fact: VA benefits and SSA benefits are not mutually exclusive. Many of today's veterans serve in the reserves or national guard and have worked extensively in the civilian economy. Now more than ever, veterans with severe disabilities are qualifying for Social Security disability benefits in addition to VA benefits.

Special Considerations for Providing WIPA Services to Veterans with Disabilities

- Conducting outreach to veterans who receive SSA disability benefits
- Providing linkages to additional employment services and supports available to veterans
- Being aware of the many specialized benefit programs and services available to veterans with disabilities from the Dept. of Veterans' Affairs (VA)
- Understanding the impact of employment on military retirement and VA disability benefits
- Understanding how SSA disability benefits and VA benefits interact

Conducting Outreach to Veterans

- Veterans with disabilities often are not connected to the traditional VR or disability services systems – especially those who have recently discharged from military service
- Special effort must be made to connect with the veterans service system and to identify local agencies serving veterans – especially those with disabilities.

Group Brainstorming Activity

What agencies in your area serve veterans – especially veterans with disabilities?

The best places to start.....

Veterans with disabilities all start out with a connection to the VA healthcare system. Start by making contacts with:

- VA Hospitals and Healthcare Centers
- VA Vet Service Centers
- State veterans' agencies

Vets Service Centers

- Provide outreach and readjustment counseling & referral services to all veterans who served in any combat zone.
- Services are also available for the family members of eligible veterans for military related issues.
- Veterans have earned these benefits through their service and all are provided at no cost to the veteran or family.

Finding Local Vet Agencies

- VA Hospitals and Healthcare Centers – for facilities locator/directory, go to:
<http://www1.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp?isFlash=1>
- VA Vet Centers – for more information, go to:
<http://www.vetcenter.va.gov/index.asp>
- State veterans' agencies – for state listings, go to:
<http://www.va.gov/statedva.htm>

Veterans Outreach Considerations

- Make sure outreach materials are clear about WIPA program eligibility (individuals must already get SSA disability benefits) and limits on WIPA services (i.e.: not assisting with SSA disability application process)
- Establish cooperative relationships with key personnel at veterans agencies to develop sources of technical assistance on veterans benefits and services – they are very complex!
- Offer reciprocal training to agencies serving veterans – these agencies know very little about SSA benefits or work incentives

Employment Services and Supports for Veterans with Disabilities

- There is a whole separate system of services especially designed to help veterans re-enter the civilian workforce
- Some programs are designed for vets with disabilities, others are available to all vets
- It is possible to get services from BOTH the veterans system and the traditional disability service system
- CWICs must explore all potential options!

VA Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Services (VR&E)

- The primary function of VA's VR&E program is to help veterans who have service-connected disabilities become suitably employed, maintain employment, or achieve independence in daily living.
- To receive an evaluation for vocational rehabilitation services, a veteran must have received an honorable or other than dishonorable discharge, have a VA service-connected disability rating of 10% or more, and submit an application for VR&E services

More about VR&E Services

- A Comprehensive Evaluation is completed with a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor that includes:
 - A full assessment of the veteran's interests, aptitudes, and abilities to determine whether the veteran is "entitled" to VR&E services
 - An assessment of whether service-connected disabilities impair the veteran's ability to find and/or hold a job using the occupational skills already attained
 - Vocational exploration and goal development

VR&E Services Continued...

- A VA Counselor decides if a veteran has an “employment handicap” based upon the results of the comprehensive evaluation.
- Entitlement to services is established if the veteran has a 20% service-connected disability **and** an employment handicap.
- If the disability is 10% service-connected, then a “serious employment handicap” must be found to establish entitlement to vocational rehabilitation services

VR&E Services Continued

- After an entitlement decision is made, the veteran and the counselor develop a rehabilitation plan. A Rehabilitation Plan is a written detailed outline of services to be provided. The following 5 service delivery tracks are available:
 - Reemployment with previous employer
 - Rapid employment services for new employment
 - Self-employment
 - Employment through long term services
 - Independent living services

Veterans Services Available at State Employment Offices

Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVERs) also known as “Vet Reps” – These are full time state employees located in state employment service local offices to provide assistance to veterans by:

- supervising the provision of all services to veterans furnished by employment service employees, including counseling, testing, and identifying training and employment opportunities;

Veteran's Employment Reps Continued...

- monitoring job listings from federal contractors to see that eligible veterans get priority in referrals to these jobs;
- promoting and monitoring the participation of veterans in federally-funded employment and training programs;
- cooperating with the VA to identify and aid veterans who need work-specific prosthetic devices, sensory aids or other special equipment.

More Services Available at State Employment Offices

Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) –
In this program, specialists develop job and training opportunities for veterans with special emphasis on veterans with service-connected disabilities.

- DVOP specialists provide direct services to veterans enabling them to be competitive in the labor market;

Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program Continued...

- Specialists provide outreach and offer assistance to disabled and other veterans by promoting community and employer support for employment and training opportunities, including apprenticeship and on-the-job training.
- The DOL provides grant funds to each state's employment service to maintain DVOP specialist positions in the state. DVOP specialists may be stationed at VA regional offices and medical centers, state or county veterans' service offices, community-based organizations, and military installations.

Entrepreneurship and Small Business Ownership for Veterans

- Veteran's Business Outreach Centers – partnership between VR&E, SBA and SBDCs. Mission to support qualified veterans who are exploring business ownership, expanding a business or moving into federal marketplace.
 - Participants must be eligible for VR&E services
 - Guidance provided on business feasibility assessment, development of business plan, financing & start-up
 - VA does NOT provide business loans or grants!
 - More info - <http://www.vboc.org/>

Entrepreneurship and Small Business Ownership for Veterans

- Small Business Administration (SBA) – Office of Veterans Business Development. The mission of the Office of Veterans Business Development is to maximize the availability, applicability and usability of all administration small business programs for Veterans, Service-Disabled Veterans, Reserve Component Members, and their dependents or survivors. <http://www.sba.gov/aboutsba/sbaprograms/ovbd/index.html>

More Resources for Small Business Development for Veterans

- The US General Services Administration (GSA) partners with the Veterans Corp. (TVC), a federally chartered 501(c)(3) organization, to provide business resources to veterans, such as access to capital, surety bonding, education and prescription coverage. For more information go to <http://www.veteranscorp.org/>
- Service Corps of Retired Executives (SCORE) offers an array of online resources through its Veteran Owned Businesses program. For more information go to: <http://www.score.org/veteran.html>

Compensated Work Therapy (CWT)

- Health care program of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) – services delivered out of VA medical centers in most cases.
- Provides a range of vocational rehabilitation services to support veterans interested in competitive jobs.
- In some locations CWT is also known as “Veterans Industries” - these designations are synonymous.

CWT Services

- State of the art vocational rehabilitation services integrated into treatment planning
- Job matching and employment supports
- Vocational assessment
- Vocational case management
- Work site and job analysis
- Consultation regarding assistive technology, ADA, and reasonable accommodation

Compensated Work Therapy Programs

- Incentive Therapy Program
- Sheltered Workshop Program
- Transitional Employment Program
- Supported Employment Program
- Transitional Residence Program

Income from CWT Programs

- For SSA, most payments from CWT programs are excluded from income entirely since they are received in conjunction with medical services.
- Participants in the CWT Supported Employment (SE) phase of the program are paid directly from local community employers. Income from CWT SE is considered earned income for SSI and title II disability benefit purposes.

Education & Training Programs for Veterans

The VA, Department of Labor (DoL) and the Department of Education (DoE) each administer a number of employment, education, and training programs for veterans. The major programs offered are:

- The Montgomery G.I. Bill - Active Duty
- The Montgomery G.I. Bill - Selected Reserve
- Veteran's Educational Assistance Program (VEAP)
- Veteran's Upward Bound
- Veteran's Employment and Training

Warning – Veteran's Education & Training Programs are Complex!

- Get help from local sources of information – Start with your Vet Service Center
- Online resources include:
 - www.military.com/benefits/veteran
 - <http://www.gibill.va.gov/>
 - <http://www.gibill2008.org/>

Programs for Veterans who are Homeless

- VA Programs for Homeless Vets

<http://www1.va.gov/homeless/>

- DOL Homeless Vets Community Reintegration Projects

[http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/hvrp/hv
rp-bp.htm](http://www.dol.gov/vets/programs/hvrp/hv
rp-bp.htm)

Final Words

- It takes time and effort to research all of the available resources for veterans – this is an important part of a CWIC's job!
- You can't know everything about the vets system – get help from knowledgeable sources!
- Relationship building is key!