Message From The Director

Significant Changes in the Field of Vocational Rehabilitation

“The Times They Are A-Changin’”. Those famous words that meant something very different in 1964 (Bob Dylan), are very applicable today. No truer words could be said today about our field. Who would have thought that 42 years after this song was recorded, his elegiac, acoustically spare meditation on the folly of war, would be appropriate today within the field of Vocational Rehabilitation.

I am not talking about war, but rather the significant changes that are upon us in the field of Vocational Rehabilitation. As of the time of this newsletter, we still have not passed the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), Title IV, which addresses the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998. RSA has just undergone a significant reduction in its workforce and is reorganizing to meet the needs of its constituents (see article 21st Century Rehabilitation Services Administration RSA). State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies and Native American Rehabilitation Programs are facing recruitment and retention issues, resource shortages and programmatic problems never before seen in our field. There are fewer University Rehabilitation Counseling Programs, and enrollment rates are significantly lower. Community Rehabilitation Programs have been forced to find additional consumers, without disabilities, in order to stay in business; experienced staff are being promoted to management, leaving behind a shortage of seasoned direct service providers, and program funding deficits are greater. Independent Living Centers are searching for additional funding sources that are not necessarily disability specific and, they are struggling to identify their new roles and responsibilities in major issues such as the Olmstead Decision and Transition School to Careers.

In addition to the significant issues facing us, we need to be asking some very important questions:

• Why aren’t we hearing a clear and focused message from the consumers and their respective organizations?

• What role and impact will the tens of thousands of disabled veterans coming home with devastating disabilities have on the VR system?

• How will the tremendous budget deficits that will affect our grandchildren influence the future VR system?

• What effect does the outsourcing of jobs to foreign countries have on our field?
Welcome!

Shanny Lim joined RRCEP II in August 2005 as a Graduate Assistant. She is currently pursuing her Masters Degree in Informatics from the State University of New York at Buffalo. She brings to the team a strong background in technology and graphic design. She is responsible for creating and designing print marketing materials, keeping our website up-to-date and providing technical support for our staff. Her recently completed publications are the 2005-2006 Program Catalog, Winter 2006 Quarterly Calendar, and Spring 2006 Quarterly Calendar.

- What effect does high health care and pension costs have on hiring people with disabilities?
- What will the long term impact be on the rights of individuals with disabilities as a result of the recent regression of ADA Supreme Court decisions?

I could go on and on addressing the new and unique issues facing us today. However, we need to respond to these challenges. So what do WE NEED TO DO?

- The first thing we need to do is become educated on how our field is changing and what impact those changes have on us.
- We must focus on the big picture which will end a form of Social Darwinism.
- We must break out of our silo mentality and reach out to each other to make appropriate proactive changes before it is too late.
- We must educate, encourage and enable our consumers to advocate and demand a system that will provide the necessary services in a timely and efficient manner.
- But most importantly we must change the paradigm. The old paradigm has historically treated individuals with disabilities as someone who needed to be fixed. This new paradigm is based on the precept that disability is a normal and natural part of life, which in no way diminishes an individual’s right to fully participate in all aspects of society. This new paradigm focuses on fixing the social and physical environment to provide meaningful and effective opportunities to individuals with disabilities.

As clever as the lyrics were in 1964, Dylan’s observations, though laced with bitterness and poetic license, were a distillation of conventional wisdom. Today’s conventional wisdom around Vocational Rehabilitation and individuals with disabilities needs to be centered on full participation, equality of opportunities, independence and economic self-sufficiency.
Spotlight: Mental Health
Vocational Implications of Psychiatric Disabilities: Strategies for Success

By Dr. Eileen Trigoboff, RN, APRN/PMH-BC, DNS, DABFN, CIP

Every job situation has the potential to work out, or not work out, for any individual. There are so many features to a job to take into account that there is no one type of job for any one person. Consider the variables we all think about when looking at a job: how is the interpersonal atmosphere of the job site, how is the physical layout of the work site, is it easy to get to where the work is conducted, when is work expected to be completed, and what skills are needed to do the job. None of these issues can be taken lightly. We all have to pick, choose, make decisions, get information, try something new, make an effort in a new arena, and otherwise get busy to come up with a coherent work life.

Now add in a psychiatric disability to those demands and requirements of considering a reasonable work life. The particular diagnosis isn’t even material in the beginning of this thought process. Schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, major depression, bipolar illness, obsessive-compulsive disorder, substance abuse, post traumatic stress disorder are just a few of the diagnostic groups. Just imagine living the symptoms of any psychiatric disability and having to cope. It adds a level of complexity that can be daunting and I applaud all who have transcended the barriers. Now that there is an awareness of what the problem is – what are some strategies for success? Let’s look at the most likely areas where you can put effort and have positive results.

One of the primary underpinnings of successful vocational-focused activities is understanding the symptoms of the mental illness, the treatments used for the problem (medications and talk therapies), and the side effects. These are realities not to be set aside. That understanding is one of the most effective factors in promoting positive vocational goals. Incorporating someone’s low energy and suspicions about other people into selecting a work life is not really all that different from considering how a brittle diabetic would handle a construction job. There must be a priority list of what is important and immediate, and a plan to address the top-of-the-list items. Learn to work with the symptoms and treatments and side effects when conceptualizing an occupational outcome for someone. If one person is distractible, sculpt a work site that keeps interruptions and spurious activity away from him or her. We all have disabilities, weaknesses, poor skills in one or many areas and we manage to work with them – so can someone with a psychiatric diagnosis.

Talk to the individual about a goal. What is the expectation? What does he or she want? Have ideas about who, what, when, where, and how been thoroughly explored from his or her perspective? What I think would be a great idea for a job might be a real nightmare for someone else. Design vocational efforts accordingly.

Next, match the vocational services to the disability. Each person experiences their diagnosis in a slightly different manner. Success is relative to that individual’s experience of the diagnosis and their particular strengths, resilience, and expectations. What has been successful for this person so far? Each experience in the workplace yields information: was there a time frame that worked well, was transportation better in one configuration rather than another, how many people were well tolerated at the work site, how do demands of physical activity play out over the long run, what has been a satisfying situation? There are so many
features that a tweak of one or many could completely rearrange someone’s responses to a work situation. Have hope and give hope.

Another vital tool for successful vocational rehabilitation is to involve people in learning the skills they need to be successful and satisfied in the community. Skill areas that many individuals have difficulty with include understanding the nuances of their expression of their mental illness and coping with the symptoms of that illness. The illness changes throughout life stages and anyone’s ability to respond to those changes increases the potential for success.

Teaching comes into the picture when focusing on a vocational outcome. Everyone needs to have defined for themselves the steps of the specific work process. Teach by describing the activity so the person can get a clear picture. It also must be clearly articulated what the benefit of doing the job will be. Why should the individual do it? Why is it important? Clarify the person’s understanding of the activity and build upon what the person already knows. Show an example of the outcome of the activity through video, worksheet, lists, poster, and/or diagrams. And the cardinal rule for effective teaching is to review the person’s understanding of the activity and roles.

Success with vocational goals has concrete outcomes. You will see:
- Client Satisfaction
- Reduced Hospitalizations
- Reduced Readmissions
- Reduced Length of Stay
- Reduced Other Hospital Utilization
- Positive Gains in Employment
- Skill Development
- Stable Accommodations
- Improvements in Perception of Quality of Life

You will have the opportunity to conduct the various steps of applying vocational services to a client’s situation. Outreach, rehabilitation goal setting, counseling and planning, readiness development, and advocacy all shape your activities. Be flexible and imaginative.

**Featured Websites**

Region II RRCEP does not endorse any of the following websites; they are included here for informational purposes only. We cannot attest to the accuracy of the information found within them.

**Reasonable Accommodations for People with Psychiatric Disabilities: An Online Resource for Educators and Employers**
http://www.bu.edu/cpr/reasaccom/index.html
Several practical answers to frequent employment related questions about reasonable psychiatric accommodations.

**National Alliance for the Mentally Ill**
http://www.nami.org
NAMI is a nonprofit, grassroots, self-help, support and advocacy organization of consumers, families, and friends of people with severe psychiatric disabilities.

**Psychiatric Rehabilitation: The Need for a Specialized Approach**
http://www.psychosocial.com/IJPR_7/approach.html
This article discusses the complexities of psychiatric disabilities, the significance of work for individuals with psychiatric disabilities, and intervention approaches that have been found effective in assisting individuals with psychiatric disabilities enter the world of work for the first time or re-enter after acquiring a psychiatric disability.

**Fountain House**
http://www.fountainhouse.org
This website provides a basic understanding of “clubhouse” models of psychosocial rehabilitation and the employment services offered.

**The Center for Mental Health Services**
http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs
CMHS is a Federal agency within the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). This website contains a number of free mental health articles and resources.

**The Coalition of Voluntary Mental Health Agencies, Inc. (Formerly known as the NY Work Exchange)**
http://www.cvmha.org
Up-to-date information on New York State and federal government policies, such as Medicare Part D prescription drug plan, PROS, and HIPAA. Trainings offered on mental health and dual diagnosis issues in the New York City area.
News Around the Region

New Jersey

New Jersey DVR - By John Williams

New Jersey continues to encourage staff to meet CSPD standards: To date thirty-seven Counselors have graduated from the University of Medicine and Dentistry (UMDNJ) with a Masters Degree in Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling. Four Counselors continue in the program and three will graduate in May 2006. This will complete NJ DVR’s contract with UMDNJ.

NJ DVR also has had two Counselors who have utilized the Department of Labor and Workforce Development’s Tuition Reimbursement Program and obtained a Masters in Counseling Degree. Not content with their achievements, upon completion of their degree program, fifteen Counselors have sat and passed the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) examination.

In the fall of 2005, New Jersey was offered a grant opportunity for Counselors without a Masters to start an on-line graduate program in Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling through The George Washington University. This received a good response from staff that were unable to commute to the traditional program at UMDNJ due to family or disability issues. As of January 2006, all six staff who applied were accepted into this program. It will be interesting to follow this new concept in rehabilitation education.

In addition, NJ DVR has utilized offering internships to graduate students as an introduction to the State Agency. This has worked to the benefit of both, as NJ DVR has been able to hire many of these interns who start with a thorough knowledge of the State Agency’s mission and goals.

New Jersey Integrated Employment Committee

CRP-RRCEP II staff sit at the table with Vocational Rehabilitation leadership in New Jersey. Members of this committee include: NJ DVRS, NJ DDD, NJ DMH, NJ CBVI, NJ Department of Education, The Boggs Center of UMDNJ, The ARC of New Jersey and the Integrated Employment Institute of UMDNJ. Together this committee addresses the complex issues facing persons with disabilities, providers of services and statewide systems. Outcomes of this committee include training and documentation design, the development of consistent Supported Employment definition and collaboration that eliminates duplication of services and wasted funding.

NJ DVRS Providers Forum

The new year brings another round of Provider’s forums across the state of NJ. These forums offer the opportunity to bring together DVRS staff and community agencies who provide employment services. Outcomes of these meetings include: the gathering of training and technical assistance needs data, improved communication, localized action planning and the chance to provide feedback to one another.

NJ DVRS Launches a “New” Documentation Tool

In an effort to streamline the paperwork that NJ DVRS requires from providers, the Intervention Plan and Service Log has been developed. Several agencies served as pilot sites for this document and have reported that it is user friendly. The launch date for this tool is March 1, 2006. Training for use of this document is provided as part of the Supported Employment Certificate Series. For local on-demand Technical Assistance for using this tool, please contact Jennifer Joyce at jjoyce@arcnj.org.

Brian Fitzgibbons Is Promoted To Assistant Director of Administrative Services

Brian Fitzgibbons has spent his entire 30 year career in public vocational rehabilitation in his home state working for The New Jersey Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. In 1990 he ventured to Trenton to become the agency’s Staff Development and Training Coordinator and was later promoted to the position of Chief of Program, Planning and Development. Recently in September 2005, he was selected to be the Assistant Director of Administrative Services.

In his new role he directs the three units within the DVRS Central Office. The activities of these units include Program Development and Evaluation, Community Rehabilitation Programs, Training and Development, Special Projects and the general administrative activities of the agency’s operation. He likes to think of this new assignment as supporting the infrastructure of DVRS to ensure that individuals with disabilities receive meaningful services that will afford them every opportunity to participate in the workforce.

Mr. Fitzgibbons currently sits on the Advisory Boards of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey’s Rehabilitation Counseling Program and the Region II
Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He serves as the Vocational Rehabilitation Resource to the State Special Education Advisory Council (SSEAC), The Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) and the NJ Council on Developmental Disabilities. A 1998 Switzer Scholar he has been the recipient of numerous state and national awards and recognitions.

New York

University at Buffalo: Universal Design

The Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access in the University at Buffalo School of Architecture and Planning has received a 5 million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research to fund a second five year cycle of its Rehabilitation Engineering Research Center on Universal Design and the Built Environment. The Center will now collaborate with the Ontario Rehabilitation Technology Consortium and representatives from the design and disability communities nationwide to research and develop critical tools to advance the field of universal design and develop exemplary products through industry partnerships. Universal design is an approach to designing products and places to be usable by all people to the greatest extent without the need for adaptation or specialized design.


St. Regis Mohawk - By Jason McDonald

The St. Regis Mohawk Tribe is proud to announce that the Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation (TVR) program received funding for another five years.

TVR is funded under a grant through the Rehabilitation Services Administration. We are funded until September 20, 2010. The staff of the TVR program includes:

- Jason McDonald, Program Manager
- Nicole David, Administrative Assistant
- Joseph Chamberlain, Counselor
- Laura Stone, Counselor
- Richard Cook, Job Developer

“The staff and I look forward to serving American Indians with disabilities in the Akwesasne community well into the future,” said Jason McDonald

Brian S. Daniels has been named Associate Commissioner of the NYS Office of Children and Family Services, Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped (CBVH). Mr. Daniels succeeds Thomas A. Robertson who retired on September 7, 2005 after a 32 year career with CBVH.

Brian began his career with CBVH in December, 1996 as Deputy Director. His duties included oversight of strategic and program planning initiatives. Prior to joining CBVH he worked for the Governor’s Office for Regulatory Reform as a policy analyst.

An ordained rabbi, Brian has served as spiritual leader of Temple Israel in Catskill, New York on a part-time basis for the past five years. He has remarked many times about the complementary nature of his two positions and his passion for human service.

NYS Commission for the Blind State Rehabilitation Council Schedule

- Thursday, 03/06/2006
  - White Plains
- Thursday, 09/14/2006
  - Buffalo
- Thursday, 06/08/2006
  - Albany
- Wednesday, 12/05/2006
  - Albany

VESID Supported Employment Training Needs Project

RRCEP II is the recipient of a VESID grant to conduct a comprehensive state wide training needs assessment. RRCEP II will survey 181 VESID funded Supported Employment providers and VESID counselors and administrators to gather data regarding desired training topics, modalities and schedules. Surveys will be available March 2006.

RRCEP, APSE, VESID Supported Employment Enhancement Project

RRCEP II is pleased to announce the development of a partnership to bring together the 181 NYS Supported Employment providers and the VESID leadership and rehabilitation counselors. This project will address the relationship between the providers and the state VR system. Join us at the APSE Supported Employment Institute May 1-2, 2006 in Lake Placid, NY to get involved.
RRCEP/CBVH Vision Rehabilitation Institute

This year’s institute will focus on labor market trends and opportunities for persons who are blind or visually impaired. Join us as we gather together community provider agencies and state Rehabilitation Counselors who provide vision rehabilitation services on May 16, 2006 in Albany, New York.

Puerto Rico
High Training Numbers

Since September 1, 2005 a total of 592 staff from Puerto Rico provider agencies and State VR have participated in:
- Documentation and Record Keeping
- Team Building
- Counseling Skills for Direct Service Providers
- Job Development and Marketing
- Job Training Intervention Techniques
- Resilience Training

Feedback for these workshops has been excellent.

Employment, Empowerment and Choice Conference

RRCEP II is pleased to host this bi-annual training event bringing together staff from PR Providers, Independent Living Centers and State VR. This premier conference features all day and 1-2 hour training sessions. Join us June 5-6, 2006 in San Juan. If you are interested in presenting, please contact Wendy Quarles at wquarles@buffalo.edu for a list of desired topics.

Virgin Islands
Virgin Islands Training Institute

The Virgin Islands Training Institute held in December 2005 brought the CRP-RRCEP Training Institute to St. Croix. RRCEP staff provided three days of training to a total of 52 participants from Community agencies, Independent Living Centers and State VR. Topics presented were: Providing Customer Driven Services, Job Development and Marketing and Managing Challenging Behaviors. Staff from the Islands are looking forward to the Summer Training Institute on June 7-8, 2006.

Virgin Islands Resource Center for the Disabled

The RRCEP is pleased to welcome a “new” provider to our CRP constituency. The Virgin Islands Resource Center for the Disabled (VIRCD) Inc. has locations in St. Thomas, St. Croix, and St. John. VIRCD has a newly funded PWI Project which promotes the use of technology to support success in career exploration and employment.

Wise brings over 18 years of experience in the public policy and legislative areas to NYSRA/RRTI. As a member of the New York State Law Revision Commission, he was the principal attorney on a project to study and recommend changes to the various elements of the State’s Criminal Procedure Law affecting criminal defendants with developmental disabilities, as well as studies regarding tort issues and areas involving surrogate decision making.

While a legislative liaison and, later, executive director of a state association of community health centers, Wise worked on matters of health care policy and health care financing affecting New York’s most vulnerable populations.

Wise earned his bachelor’s degree in philosophy from the State University College at Potsdam. He was awarded a Juris Doctor degree from the Albany Law School in 1987. He currently resides in Saratoga Springs. NYSRA, a statewide association represents over 130 organizations and individuals that provide services to individuals with disabilities.
Training Announcements

New Training Workshops

The CRP-RRCEP II is pleased to announce the offering of two new training workshops: Practicing Rehabilitation in Production/Sheltered Settings and Providing Customer Driven Services. Both workshops focus on the provision of person centered, customer driven vocational rehabilitation services.

Practicing Rehabilitation in Production/Sheltered Settings offers an opportunity to explore the challenges of balancing production responsibilities with supporting consumers to transition to community based work opportunities. Providing Customer Driven Services focuses on the process of gathering customer satisfaction information and integrating the findings into program and services design. Check out the RRCEP II website at www.rcep2.buffalo.edu or contact Wendy Quarles at wquarles@buffalo.edu for more information.

National Supported Employment Certificate

The CRP-RRCEP II continues to offer the eight part National Certificate in Supported Employment. This series has been designed in accordance with the competencies and standards set by the Association for Persons in Supported Employment (APSE) www.apse.org and the Association for Community Rehabilitation Providers (ACRE) www.acreeducators.org.

This series is nationally recognized and offers portability to other states. Attendees receive attendance certificates for each workshop completed. Upon completion of the eight mandatory workshops, participants are eligible for the National Certificate. Workshop titles are:

- Orientation to Supported Employment
- Job Coach I
- Job Coach II
- Counseling Skills for Direct Service Providers
- Training Techniques in Employment Settings
- Documentation and Record Keeping
- Functional and Situational Assessment
- Job Development

ONLINE Registration

RRCEP II is currently developing an Online Registration process. This new process will be piloted beginning with our state agencies in the Fall of 2006. Watch our website and future newsletters for updates regarding this exciting new system.

Our new fast, easy & secure system will:
- Streamline registration & confirmation process
- Enhance the assessment of training needs
- Provide efficient collection of appropriate accommodations needs
Customized Training Program

RRCEP II is committed to providing training that meets the needs of its constituents. As a result, we continuously assess the topics, training formats, and expected outcomes requested by staff, supervisors and administrators. The following programs listed in the catalog have already been designed based on our constituents’ input and training preferences. If you have a need to modify our existing programs, please contact the RRCEP II staff to discuss how a training could be best designed for you. Additionally, we understand that there are many factors restricting staff development, such as time limitations, geographic location, or strained financial resources. RRCEP II has been creating solutions to expand the training formats that could best suit your needs without sacrificing content.

The following factors are considered when designing and offering programs throughout the region:

1. Customized Content:

   - RRCEP II explores new training topics through a systematic needs assessment process that includes input from direct service and administrative staff, state and federal agencies, and the research literature.

   - Our standard trainings described in our quarterly calendar have been developed to address our most requested training topics and to reach a broad range of participants. Keep in mind that the content of these programs can be customized to your unique needs.

2. Outcome-driven Training:

   - All of RRCEP II’s training programs have been designed with the intent to give our participants the anticipated skills necessary to perform their job duties. The content that is provided in our trainings is enhanced by numerous exercises and opportunities for practical skill development that can be easily applied in the work setting.

   - Through our extensive needs assessment process, standard training topics are often requested. However, the new issues in the field that arise from our constituents direct the content and design of our future trainings. For example, a CRP administrator identified that she had a great need to train her workshop staff to assist consumers with their vocational goals while maintaining the workshop’s production rate. The new program, “Practicing Rehabilitation in Production/Sheltered Settings,” was developed to help staff attain the skills for the administrator’s desire outcome.

3. Delivery and Format Options:

   a. Standard Trainings: RRCEP II has offered hundreds of one, two and three day training opportunities over the past 27 years. These intensive training programs promote skill development and education in topic areas of high demand at a centralized location. They are attended by the staff of State Agencies, ILCs, Native American Rehabilitation Programs, CAPs, and Community Rehabilitation Programs. These workshops have established curricula and learning objectives. It is expected that the participants will demonstrate improved skills and knowledge in the areas addressed by the curriculum. Program descriptions for the RRCEP II standard trainings can be found on our website at http://www.rcep2.buffalo.edu/prog/index.html

   b. Half-Day Seminars: RRCEP II appreciates the different staff training needs of its participants due to their experience in the field, position, or specialization. Half-day seminars are available to provide training in rehabilitation administration and management, advanced counseling and job coaching techniques, and other specialized topics. These training opportunities will provide exposure to the rehabilitation issue and connections to the resources that will lead to integration and further learning on the topic. Examples of half-day seminars include:
      - Traumatic Brain Injury
      - Medical Aspects of Disabilities
      - Job Coaching for Psychiatric Disabilities
      - Job Readiness
      - Developing Workplace Supports
      - School to Work Transition
      - Cultural Competence
      - Crisis Management

   Half-day seminars will be scheduled on an “as needed” basis. Please contact RRCEP II at (716) 829-2875 for more information.

   c. Distance Learning: Through a partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Stout’s Rehabilitation On-Line Learning Program (ROLL), RRCEP II offers up to 14 distance learning courses annually. Online learning offers rehabilitation staff the opportunity to learn anywhere, anytime and at their own pace. Travel is eliminated therefore, staff can spend more of their valuable time with consumers. Online learning occurs over an extended period of time allowing the learner to apply the new knowledge to their job setting. Lastly, the information continue -->
remains on the site for the learner to revisit at their convenience. Since the inception of the partnership in 2001, 547 individuals have taken advantage of the scholarships available to the constituents of the RRCEP II.

Examples of the Distance Learning Workshops being offered in 2006 include:

- Rehabilitation and Persons with Cognitive Disabilities
- Rehabilitation and Persons with Physical Disabilities
- Ethics and Advanced Rehabilitation of Persons with Cognitive Disabilities
- Ethics and Advanced Rehabilitation of Persons with Physical Disabilities
- Rehabilitation and Persons with Psychiatric Disabilities
- Ethics and Innovations in Rehabilitation Services

For more information please contact Donna Stabler at (716) 829-2079 or dstabler@buffalo.edu

d. Teleconferences: The CRP and General RRCEP Programs offer teleconferencing via telephone conference calls or video conferencing as a cost effective training alternative. Teleconferencing allows numerous audience members from around the region to participate in discussions designed to address specific topics or training needs.

Future plans for teleconferencing include:

- Benefits Planning
- Organizational Change
- Rehabilitation Legislation
- Management Issues and Strategies
- Trends in the Field of Vocational Rehabilitation

Additional uses will include Technical Assistance Teleconferences and follow-up conference calls with the participants of the Job Coach and Supported Employment Training Series. For more information, please contact Wendy Quarles at (716) 829-2875 or wquarles@buffalo.edu

e. Alternative Media: Several CD-ROM’s already have been developed for use in the Job Coach and Vocational Assessment for Beginners training programs to serve as a convenient resource tool for staff when on the job. RRCEP II will be expanding the role and purpose of the CD-ROM’s to function as a self-directed training modality for direct service staff and supervisors. Supervisors soon will be able to start the professional staff development of new employees without waiting for scheduled programs.

4. Other Training Opportunities:

- Keep in mind that if you have a training need or idea for your agency or local consortium, RRCEP II is your resource to help develop training programs and series, provide support for conferences, or bring “experts in the field” to your region.

The RRCEP II Advisory Committee is a combined Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) and General RRCEP group with 35 members representing State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies, Independent Living Centers, Client Assistance Programs, Community Rehabilitation Programs, and Native American Programs (121). The Committee represents various rehabilitation agencies and includes members of underrepresented minorities and persons with disabilities. The Committee meets twice a year. The summer meeting provides a forum for an exchange of ideas and suggestions on the future direction of RRCEP II relative to current trends in vocational rehabilitation.

The winter meeting, recently held on January 5, 2006 in New York City, provided an opportunity for RRCEP II to report on all of the activities that have taken place over the past six months, as well as covering a variety of discussion topics. Some of the topics discussed at the recent meeting were distance learning, transitioning, technical assistance, staff recruitment and retention, vocational evaluation, and upcoming national and statewide events.

RRCEP II greatly values the advice, direction and leadership that the Advisory Committee provides. Our next Advisory Committee meeting is scheduled for July 2006 in Buffalo, NY.
Technical Assistance Brief:
Maintaining Cohesive Teams in the Midst of Change and Turnover

Many Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) have endured extended periods of time when direct service staff appear to be leaving their positions faster than new staff can be hired. Talented staff have a tendency to be promoted early in their careers or they move on to state agency positions. Part time or per diem employees are often in transition periods in their lives making staff who can offer a long term employment commitment a rare occurrence. In addition, there are just some individuals who enter the field because “it’s a job” and find out that vocational rehabilitation is just “not for them”.

In the past few years, several CRPs have requested technical assistance to support their supervisors and managers who are trying to maintain strong work teams with ever-changing staff. RRCEP II will be disseminating a Technical Assistance Brief during the Spring of 2006 to provide some guidance in team building/strengthening for the challenges that many CRPs are facing with staffing.

Some suggested strategies include:
• Don’t wait until all the “changes have settled.”
• Have the courage to understand what group dynamics may be contributing to shifting of staff.
• Preserve or create fun office rituals.
• Use work style inventories with new and existing staff to plot the diversity of team strengths as it changes.
• Use mentors (who are not supervisors) to educate the new staff about the nuances of your program and to create a welcoming environment.

Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) Reorganizes

On October 1, 2005 RSA closed its ten regional offices and eliminated a significant portion of their work force. As a direct result of these reorganization activities, the US Department of Education has decided to move the workload of its regional offices into RSA’s Washington D.C. headquarters. Through the utilization of technology, RSA will continue to provide the same services and programs for persons with disabilities across the nation. RSA believes that this new structure will strengthen programs without compromising services for individuals with disabilities by ensuring:

Better Services for Individuals with Disabilities
• Modernizing RSA means providing services more effectively.
• New management approach supported by technology means RSA will be able to monitor and administer services from one central location.
• Administration from a single location means the elimination of disparities. This will result in more integrated program planning.
• New structure will free up administrative and overhead resources. This can be used to provide more programs and services.

Better Communication with State Agencies Serving Individuals with Disabilities
• State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Agencies will directly communicate with headquarters. This means that State Agencies will get what they need faster.
• The new RSA will include a unit that promotes meaningful communication between RSA and consumer organizations.
• All services provided to the states will be more consistent. The expert guidance RSA provides to state agencies will be increased because a team of five program staff will be assigned to work closely with each state.

Better Accountability for Taxpayers
• The new structure will eliminate duplication of tasks, better utilize staff skills, strengthen and streamline monitoring, technical assistance, fiscal management and program implementation.
• The consolidation will result in savings without compromising services.

This is a modified version of what RSA has on its website at http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/users rsa/index.html
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This publication is published bi-annually in the Fall and Spring. For a copy, go to our website at http://www.rcep2.buffalo.edu/

If you have an article you would like to submit for publication in this newsletter, e-mail Shanny Lim at sheaulim@buffalo.edu.

We cannot guarantee publication of articles submitted, but all will be considered.

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