

Aligning Targeted Customer Preparation with Enhanced Job Development

Oregon Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Abstract

The Oregon Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (OVRs) has adopted the “Enhancing Employment Outcomes” model of services. This project trains staff to recognize and target services based on level of customer preparation for employment, and to provide enhanced job-development services. Customer preparation is based on the concept of motivational intervention (MI). The MI approach assists customers with examining and resolving their ambivalence about employment. The enhanced job-development services involved customized approaches with employers to find better job matches for customers, especially those with the most significant disabilities (MSD).

Background

In 2005, the OVRs underwent an external evaluation to identify strategies to improve employment outcomes. Recommendations included focusing on customer preparation (e.g., reliability, dependability, and the motivation to work) versus work skills, as well as training counselors to provide customized job development and placement services.

As a result of the evaluation, the OVRs decided to implement MI techniques. The agency also used job-development training materials and tools purchased through the Canadian company Dover Training Group-Employment Management Professionals.

Purpose, Goal, and Implementation

The first purpose of the practice was to use MI techniques to assess customer readiness and to plan appropriate vocational services, or to help the person decide if he or she was interested in working. The second purpose was to customize job-development approaches based on customer ability and job preparation. The goal of the practice was to improve employment outcomes, particularly for customers with MSD, while reducing the number of unsuccessful closures and service dollars spent on customers who were not ready for employment.

Piloting Motivational Interviewing and Job Development Strategies and Statewide Expansion.

An initial pilot project engaged 40 counselors and their managers in trainings about MI and enhanced job development. Counselors used profiles for customers based on their work barriers and readiness, and planned job development and vocational strategies accordingly. Counselors were also trained in job development and labor market penetration.

The pilot project was successful in increasing employment outcomes, decreasing unsuccessful closures, and reducing the money spent on unsuccessful closures. The success of the pilot led to a statewide expansion of these trainings to all counselors. The counselors involved in the pilot project became a resource for their peers, taking on roles of mentors and advisors.

To help support counselors in adopting and using the MI approach, the agency formed the MI support team. This group consists of three counselors who travel around the state providing consultation and resources and assessing consistency of use and ways to enhance adoption of MI strategies.

Changing Job-Development Services Purchasing.

In 2010, the OVRs moved from a fee-for-service model to an outcome-based payment model. The agency wanted to set up a system that reinforced active engagement with employers and efficiency of finding jobs. The contract changes were difficult for job-developer vendors, many of which relied on hourly payments. The OVRs set up a 15-month transition period from the old to the new system. During this time the payment structure was a balance of fees for service (e.g., job coaching) and milestone payments (e.g., a customer placed in a job).

The OVRs also began offering its curriculum to contracted job developers along with VR staff, as well as in specialized trainings just for vendors. Approximately 60 of the 244 job developer vendors took part in these early trainings, and about half of the vendors continued with the agency under new contracts.

Establishing an Employment Team.

To support the emphasis on job development and employer relationships, the OVRS formed an employment team. The team builds relationships with large companies, and ensures that the agency has a group of readily available and highly trained contracted job developers.

The OVRS has developed an evaluation system that uses data from the state case-management system and generates a “report card” for each of the contracted vendors. The agency tracks data from placements and successful closures by customer type, and then rates job developers based on number of placements, quality of jobs, and severity of customer work barriers.

Results

The 40-counselor pilot resulted in an additional 113 job placements, reducing the number of unsuccessful closures by 60 in one year. This translates into approximately \$184,500 of service-dollar savings. In FY2010, the number of successful closures continued to increase to 1,570.

The OVRS saw a decrease in cost for job-developer expenditures from 2008 to 2010, although at the same time they saw a decrease in the number of vendors that contract with the agency. In 2010, the OVRS spent approximately \$1 million less than it did in 2008, with the percentage of customers who were closed with an employment outcome increasing from 24% in 2008 to 48% in 2010. The agency lost approximately 20% of its vendors between 2008 and 2009.

MI techniques were helpful in keeping counselors engaged and more effectively working with those who were receiving services. As the agency continues to serve individuals with MSD, the MI approach offers counselors tools to work with each customer at the stage they are at in the job-search process.

For more information about this practice please contact:

Kristina Kennedy: kristina.kennedy@state.or.us

Most Significant Disabilities Case Studies Contributors

INTERVIEWEES

All interviewees are from the Oregon Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

Stephanie Taylor

Kristina Kennedy

Cheryl Furrer

Heather Lynch

Amy Kincaid

Rachael Holland

EXPERT DELPHI PANEL

Cheryl Bates-Harris

National Disability Rights Network

Pisnu Bua-lam

West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services

Charlene Dwyer, Ed.D.

Wisconsin Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Christine Johnson, M.A., C.R.C.

Technical Assistance and Continuing Education (TACE) Region 5

Don Kay

Washington State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Patricia Rogan, Ph.D.

University of Indiana

Fredric K. Schroeder, Ph.D.

ARPE/Interwork Institute, San Diego State University and the SDSU Foundation

Jo-Ann Sowers, Ph.D.

Regional Research Institute on Human Services, Portland State University

Beverlee J. Stafford

National Rehabilitation Association

Sue Swenson

Systems Advocate

Leslie Waite

Former Walgreens Project Manager

Bobby Silverstein

Center for the Study and Advancement of Disability Policy



The VR-RRTC, a project of the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston, is a five-year cooperative agreement with the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) and the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) of the US Department of Education, Grant # H133B070001.