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VocRehab Vermont**

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**MEMORANDUM**

TO: All DVR Staff

FROM: Diane Dalmasse

DATE: June 15, 2020

SUBJECT: Guidance regarding job placement, job development, progressive employment and worksite supports during the COVID-19 pandemic. Effective June 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2020 through July 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020

**Overview**

This memo is intended to provide guidance for all DVR and VABIR staff around providing employment services during this pandemic. Consistent with the Governor's guidance, the overriding concern for DVR and VABIR will be to do so safely and to prevent the spread of the virus. DVR and VABIR will routinely update this guidance as the conditions change and to remain consistent with direction from the administration.

**Section I. Guidance for Business Account Managers (BAMs), Employment Consultants (ECs) and Job Coaches regarding job development and employer outreach, progressive employment, and worksite support.****Job Development and Employer Outreach**

To limit exposure for DVR and VABIR staff and our employer partners, BAMs and ECs will continue to conduct most outreach remotely. Therefore, for the period covered by this memo, BAM and EC staff will conduct most employer outreach remotely via phone and video conference. In some rare cases it may only be possible to outreach effectively to an employer through an in-person meeting. In such circumstances, the BAM or the EC must:

- Get approval from the direct supervisor after demonstrating an in-person meeting is necessary
- Follow the safety guidelines for an in-person meeting outlined in Section II

When conducting job development and job placement activities on behalf of VR consumers, BAM and EC staff will, in consultation with the VR counselor, follow the guidance in Section III of this memo regarding job placement and COVID-19.

**Progressive Employment**

During this period, DVR and VABIR will continue to suspend the following in-person progressive employment

activities: informational interviews, company tours and job shadows. This is because these are primarily exploration and assessment activities and are not essential to be completed at this time.

*Informational Interviews:* Informational interviews will only be conducted via phone or video conference. BAM, EC and Job Coach staff will not arrange for or participate in, in person informational interviews.

*Company Tours:* BAM, EC and Job Coach staff will not arrange for or participate in any in person company tours during the period covered by this memo.

*Job Shadows:* BAM, EC and Job Coach staff will not arrange for in person job shadows during the period covered by this memo.

During this period, DVR and VABIR will allow for and support work experiences and On the Job Training Agreements (OJTs) for consumers who are interested in participating in these activities. This is because these activities can lead directly to competitive employment. When considering the development of a work experience or OJT agreement, BAM and EC staff in consultation with the VR counselor, will follow the guidance in Section III of this memo regarding competitive job placement and COVID-19.

Typically, a BAM or an EC might be onsite on the first day of a work experiences or OJT and/or check in periodically with the employer. *If at all possible, the EC or BAM should arrange to provide this support remotely.* If it is absolutely necessary for a BAM or EC to be on-site, they must:

- Get approval from the direct supervisor after demonstrating that being on site is necessary
- Follow the safety guidelines for an in-person meeting outlined in Section II

### Worksite Supports

In most cases, BAM, EC and Job Coach staff will not provide any in person on site work supports during the period covered by memo. Staff can provide support remotely via phone or video conference. For example, a Job Coach can support a consumer on their first day of work via a phone check in during a lunch break.

In exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary for an employment staff person to go to a worksite to assist a consumer. This should only be considered if the consumer's employment is at risk and an on-site intervention is absolutely needed. Before going on-site, the employment staff person must:

- Get approval from the direct supervisor after demonstrating that being on site is necessary
- Follow the safety guidelines for an in-person meeting outlined in Section II

## **Section II: Health and Safety Guidelines for Employment Staff for In Person Contact**

At this time, no BAM, EC or Job Coach will be required to provide on-site and in person services if they have concerns about their personal health and safety. If a BAM, EC or Job Coach volunteers to provide in person support for a consumer at a work experience or OJT or competitive placement they must abide by the following safety protocols:

- Staff will wear a facemask in the presence of the consumer and any other people.
- While on site, the staff should adhere to strict social distancing, keeping at least six feet about from others.

- Staff will wash their hands frequently and for at least twenty seconds. If soap and water are not available, staff should use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Staff will keep the time they spend on the work site to the absolute minimum necessary.
- If possible, they will meet with the consumer and employer outdoors or in a well-ventilated area.

### **Section III: Guidance for All DVR and VABIR Staff Regarding Consumer Job Placement**

#### Overview

The DVR process has always been and will continue to be a consumer driven one. In that respect, the decision to pursue, or not pursue, employment or participate in a work experience or OJT is ultimately the consumer's. It is DVR and VABIR's role to help the consumer access the information they need to make a fully informed decision. First and foremost, the consumer will be encouraged to contact their health care provider/PCP for consultation regarding their fitness for employment. There may also be situations where the VR counselor and employment team should not support the consumer going to work or participate in a work experience or OJT because the potential risk is too great. This guidance is intended to help counselors and employment team members through the counseling process and document the process and outcome appropriately.

#### Factors which would Prevent DVR from Supporting a Consumer to Accept a Job Opportunity or Participate in a Work Experience or OJT include:

- Is the consumer over 60?
- Regardless of their age does the consumer have underlying health conditions that would make them especially vulnerable such as:
  - People with chronic lung disease or moderate to severe asthma
  - People who have serious heart conditions
  - People who are immunocompromised
    - Many conditions can cause a person to be immunocompromised, including cancer treatment, smoking, bone marrow or organ transplantation, immune deficiencies, poorly controlled HIV or AIDS, and prolonged use of corticosteroids and other immune weakening medications
  - People with severe obesity (body mass index [BMI] of 40 or higher)
  - People with diabetes
  - People with chronic kidney disease undergoing dialysis
  - People with liver disease (CDC Coronavirus Disease 2019 4/2/20)
  - Does the consumer live with other vulnerable individuals who could be infected?

If any of the above apply, the VR counselor and employment team must advise the consumer against the job. DVR and VABIR must not offer any support for a job opportunity that puts the consumer at risk.

The only exception to the above would be if the job is a work from home opportunity or where the consumer can reliably self-isolate.

#### What Factors should the Counselor Consider when Counseling a Younger and Healthy Consumer about a Job Opportunity, Work Experience or OJT?

If the consumer is younger and relatively healthy, the counselor should counsel them around the following issues before supporting the job opportunity:

- What is the potential risk in the work environment? Many employers have information on their websites about safety precautions they have put in place. The BAMs and EC staff can provide good information on which employers have implemented the good safety protocols. The VR counselor can also assist the consumer develop questions they need answered before accepting a position.
- Does the consumer live with other vulnerable individuals who could be infected? If this is the case, VR must not support the placement.
- How would the consumer get to work? Would they rely on public transportation or other less safe means?
- If the consumer is under 18 years old and/or has a guardian, is the guardian in agreement about pursuing the job opportunity? This is a direct conversation between VR and the guardian and not based upon consumer report.
- Have they consulted with a health care provider?

### Case Note Documentation if the Counselor Supports the Placement, Work Experience or OJT

The following are sample case notes documenting the counselor's process and decision to support the job placement.

#### *Michael*

*Michael is a current VR participant and is seeking immediate employment after experiencing furlough from his current employer due to COVID-19 protocols for non-essential businesses. He has previous retail experience and expressed interest in Hannaford Market, South Barre, located very close to Michael's home. Michael is 35 years old and, according to his medical records, has no major underlying health conditions. Due to COVID-19 circumstances and for Michael to make an informed choice, we discussed the following based on Labor Market information from the District Business Account Manager:*

- *Hannaford is deemed an essential business, is fully operational and seeking part-time as well as temporary staff*
- *Hannaford has measures in place to ensure the safety of their customers, staff & job seekers: <https://www.hannaford.com/customer-service/htg-coronavirus-updates>*
- *Current opportunities are posted here: <https://www.hannaford.com/about-us/careers>*
- *Applications are received online, however, interviews will take place at the store location (due, in part, to the customer facing nature of the positions)*
- *Progressive Employment options are available to assist with career exploration (Informational Interview & company tour)*

*Michael will consider the information and we'll touch base again in 2 workdays to evaluate applying at Hannaford, South Barre.*

#### *Jennie*

*Jennie has been offered a bank teller position at the Merchants Bank. We discussed the potential risk of COVID-19 if she accepted the job. Jennie is 25 years old and in good health, according to her primary care doctor. She lives with her sister, who is 27, and is also in good health. No vulnerable individuals live with her who could be infected. We discussed the protocols that Merchants Bank has put in place to keep staff safe. She will be working in the drive through and have no in person contact with customers. She would have limited contact with coworkers, but Merchants Bank is requiring strict social distancing. The bank also is deep cleaned daily and has hand sanitizer and disinfectant sprays available. Jennie's sister will drive her to the job, so she*

*does not have to take the bus. I discussed with Jennie that it was impossible to eliminate all risk. Based on the information she has; she feels it is a safe option for her. I authorized \$100 for gas money for Jennie to pay her sister until she gets her first paycheck.*

#### Case Note Documentation if the Counselor Does Not Support the Placement

The following is a sample case note documenting the counselor's decision not to support the job placement.

*John is interested in applying to Hannaford as a grocery clerk. I discussed with John that even though he is only 55 he does have cardiovascular disease which puts him at higher risk for COVID-19. I shared with him I felt this work environment was too risky for him. John feels he must work right now. I suggested we research with the employment consultant and Business Account Manager alternative job opportunities that might be safer options. John feels he does not have time to explore other options and told me he plans to apply to Hannaford. I told John I could not support his decision and strongly urged him to reconsider. He requested funds for work clothing. I denied this request because VR cannot support this job opportunity.*