

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation – Jobs for Independence

Program Overview

Vermont secured a multi-year research grant to explore the impact of “enhanced” employment services for SNAP-Eligible Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDS). The target populations for this project were intentionally the hardest to serve in our communities:

- Individuals with Substance Abuse disorders
- Vermonters with mental health concerns
- Homeless and housing insecure individuals
- Ex-Offenders

The Jobs for Independence (JFI) program, is a demonstration project administered by the Department for Children and Families (DCF) Economic Services Division (ESD). The goal of the program is to test innovative approaches that will reduce dependence on SNAP (3Squares Vermont). DCF/ESD contracts with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) to:

- 1) provide clinical assessments through its Employee Assistance Program (EAP) staff, to identify barriers to employment that confront SNAP recipients; and
- 2) connect SNAP recipients to treatment and resources, including employment services through DVR and the Vermont Association for Business Industry and Rehabilitation (VABIR), to reduce barriers to employment and help recipients obtain employment.

Staff and Partners

Each DVR district office has one dedicated Vocational Counselor to serve the JFI participants in that district. EAP supports the project with 7.5 positions, and VABIR supports the project with 7 staff.

Recent Developments and Accomplishments

Regional teams were developed over the past year to support implement the project. Teams include staff from:

- Department of Children and Families, Economic Services Division
- Department of Labor
- Community College of Vermont
- Local Community Action Programs across the State

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Future Directions

Now that the study has enrolled all participants, work will focus on strengthening the delivery of services so that participants can overcome their barriers to employment. The needs of this population are so deep and challenging that coordinated services and support is essential. Based on the study's success so far, EAP and DVR are now working with DCF/ESD, VDOL, and CCV to see if there are ways to sustain the work and the partnership after the study is complete in December 2018. The hope is to maintain the partnerships and find funding to continue the program.

Results

Over the last year the study has enrolled over 2,500 participants. Half (1,250) have been assigned to the treatment group and 80% of the treatment group participants attended their first EAP appointment. Close to 5000 referrals to community resource organizations have been made for services including education and training, substance abuse and mental health treatment, housing and transportation, primary care and work search. These supports and services have helped 341 participants obtain jobs.

Success Stories (pseudonyms used):

Joe and Jill moved here a few months ago. Joe lost his job, and Jill is on SSI. They have been homeless and staying in hotels. Joe has been coming in weekly to prepare for and apply for jobs. Both Joe and Jill recently started attending Vermont Adult Learning. Joe has interviewed with 4 different companies in the past month. This week Joe was offered a full-time position with a local transportation company as a cleaner and fueler. Joe was referred to VDOL and the WIOA Orientation to attain his CDL. Lastly, they have found an apartment within walking distance to Joe's new job!

Sarah has been homeless since last December and unemployed since 2014. Sarah started a work experience supported by VABIR and DVR at a local thrift store in August. We created a resume, searched and applied for jobs. Sarah was hired at McDonald's part time, but is often called in, working 40+ hours weekly. Sarah is looking at apartments and asked for help with the applications from the Homeless Prevention Center.

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Jim has struggled finding employment as he is on the sex offender registry. Jim started receiving his SSI benefits again, after losing them during incarceration. We helped him find part-time work on a cleaning crew at a local resort in July. Since that time, he has met with the benefits counselor and bought a car. As a result of our ongoing support, he was offered a full-time supervisor position at his job, and he was pre-approved for a home loan.