

## **Pilot Project**

Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) is preparing to launch a pilot project to encourage individuals with disabilities to transition from center-based work settings into community-based jobs. The project is expected to launch in October for individuals who are eligible for VR services in Dakota County.

The pilot project is based on a successful model that was developed and implemented in Ohio. It relies upon a strong collaborative partnership in which the public VR program and county staff work closely with center-based facilities to provide personalized career planning for individuals who want to move from center-based settings into community-based jobs. Using this approach, Ohio has achieved a substantial increase in the number of individuals with disabilities moving out of segregated work settings and into competitive integrated employment.

The Dakota County pilot project will test whether the Ohio model can be adapted successfully in Minnesota and whether we can find new and efficient ways to leverage funding to support more people in competitive integrated jobs in the community.

Under the pilot project two VR counselors will be embedded in a facility work setting as part of a team that includes county staff and facility-based staff – all working closely with individuals to help them move into community-based jobs. ProAct Inc., which operates a facility in Eagan, and Dakota County Social Services will join VRS as the active partners in the pilot project.

### **How it works**

Two VR counselors – one who will transfer from the Apple Valley VRS office and one new hire – will be embedded at the ProAct facility in Eagan. They will work with ProAct staff and Dakota County staff to identify individuals currently working in the facility who are interested in moving into community-based jobs. These individuals will then be invited to apply for VR services.

The model is built upon a person-centered philosophy of service provision that supports positive control and self-direction of people's own lives. In the pilot project, the VR counselors will engage in person-centered assessment and planning for each individual to determine eligibility and to identify jobs that match an individual's interests, strengths, and support needs – as well as a benefits analysis and information about work incentives to maximize earning potential.

The co-location of VR counselors at the facility is a key factor in the success of this model. The counselors become active members of each individual's team, providing guidance and counseling throughout the career planning process. The embedded counselors also act as a direct liaison with county staff, ensuring ease of referral, streamlined eligibility, assessment and planning processes, and regular connection with individuals and their teams.

### **Who's involved**

Vocational Rehabilitation Services: Abbie Wells-Herzog, project manager; Rich Wagner, VRS manager in Dakota County; two VR counselors.

Dakota County: Megan Zeilinger, managerial oversight; one half-time person to work with staff.

ProAct, Inc.: Carolyn Dobis and Heather Deutschlaender