**PRIDE Provider/Peer Mentor Module #3:**

**Division of Rehabilitation Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (DRS-VR)**

Transcript

Hello and welcome to PRIDE Provider Module 3: Division of Rehabilitation Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (DRS-VR). This module features PRIDE partner agency Illinois Department of Human Services, or IDHS. Illinois created IDHS in 1997 to provide Illinois residents with streamlined access to integrated services, especially those who are striving to move from welfare to work and economic independence, and others who face multiple challenges to self-sufficiency.

Hi, I’m Quinetta Wade, Director of the Division Rehabilitation Services. We’ll start with the module content overview. This module provides information for service providers about the role of DRS-VR, core services and supports offered by DRS-VR, how to connect job-seeking refugees to a VR office and VR counselor, Illinois WorkNet Centers, and featured PRIDE partner: Business and Career Services.

We’ll begin with some facts about job seekers with disabilities in the U.S. People with disabilities are employed at a much lower rate than the general population. As of 2016, only 17.9% of Americans with disabilities were employed, compared to 65.3% of the non-disabled population. People with disabilities, including refugees with disabilities, can work and pursue employment goals and careers with the right kinds of supports and resources. One of the most prominent resources for people with disabilities in Illinois is the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), a key PRIDE partner. DRS can provide critical services to open the door to employment pathways for job-seeking refugees with disabilities.

What is VR? VR stands for “vocational rehabilitation.” VR services are provided through DRS, the Division of Rehabilitation Services, which is part of the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). VR helps people with disabilities find and keep jobs. The goal of VR is to support people with disabilities to “find quality employment” that pays a competitive wage and “offers a chance for advancement.”

Illinois Department of Human Services, or DHS. Every state has a vocational rehabilitation agency that is designed to help job-seekers with disabilities meet their employment goals. The Division of Rehabilitation Services, or DRS, is part of DHS and is the state's lead agency serving individuals with disabilities. DRS provides employment services for more than 45,000 job-seekers with disabilities in 45 offices across the state of Illinois.

The mission of DRS is to “work in partnership with people with disabilities and their families to assist them in making informed choices to achieve full community participation through employment, education, and independent living opportunities.”

DRS serves diverse populations, including both people looking for jobs and employers. People with all types of disabilities, including refugees with disabilities and people who face barriers to employment that result from physical or cognitive impairments, may apply for DRS-VR services. DRS also works in tandem with employers who desire to hire a diverse work force, to provide accessible services to customers with disabilities, and to provide reasonable accommodations to employees with disabilities. DRS helps such employers by conducting job analysis and providing training to employers on a local or statewide level, including topics related to disability awareness and the Americans with Disabilities Act. Several financial incentives are available to businesses that hire individuals with disabilities.

DRS offers several programs to support employment of people with disabilities. Key programs offered by DRS-VR are Transition for Youth, the Home Services Program, the Bureau of Blind Services, the Traumatic Brain Injury Program, and Services to Individuals who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing or Deaf-Blind, and Vocational Rehabilitation, or VR. The remainder of this module will focus on VR services.

The VR process involves several stages. These include determination of eligibility, vocational needs assessment, development of an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) development, coordination of services, and post-employment services. Eligibility determination involves figuring out if the client qualifies for services. In order to assess the client’s vocational needs, the VR counselor learns more about the client’s interests, skills, and the services and supports the client might need. Together the client and counselor develop a written Individualized Plan for Employment, or IPE, which outlines the client’s vocational goal and the services he or she will receive to reach the goal. The last stages of the VR process involve coordination of services to reach the client’s employment goal and post-employment services to help the client keep his or her job once he or she gets it.

So, who is eligible for VR services? Many people with disabilities of working age are eligible for VR services. To be eligible for VR services, an individual should be between 16 and 64 years of age and have a physical or mental impairment that constitutes or results in a substantial barrier to employment. In addition, he or she must be able to achieve a satisfying employment outcome from VR services and require VR services to prepare for, secure, retain, or regain employment.

How can DRS-VR support job-seeking refugees with disabilities? DRS-VR services can be accessed by diverse populations with disabilities, including refugees. DRS-VR services and programs can support refugees with disabilities to prepare for, enter, retain and/or advance in full-time or part-time employment.

Now that we’ve gone over some important points about DRS-VR and the services it provides, we’ll share some information on ways that service providers can support job-seeking refugees with disabilities to access DRS-VR services.

Displayed on the screen is a graphic showing the seven steps that refugees with disabilities must go through to use Vocational Rehabilitation services. Each step will be explained following this overview. The first step is connecting with a local VR office. The next step is connecting with a DRS-VR counselor and providing the counselor with all required documents. The counselor will then determine the individual’s eligibility for VR services. After the individual has been determined to be eligible, he or she will work with the counselor to identify and employment goal and the services that will be needed to achieve this goal. The counselor and client will then create a written Individualized Plan for Employment, or IPE. The next step is obtaining employment and following up with DRS. Once a successful employment outcome has been achieved, the client’s case with DRS will be closed.

So, how can service providers connect refugee clients with disabilities with VR services? The first step is to contact a local VR office, which can be identified using the VR office locator on the DHS website. Next the service provider can support the client to complete the online referral application on the DHS website. Within 30 days a VR counselor will contact the client and meet with him or her to make an eligibility determination. The slide contains links to the VR office locator and online VR referral application.

DRS online application. This slide shows DRS’s online self-referral form. With support from service providers, clients can start the DRS-VR application process by completing and submitting this form. Once it is submitted, a DRS counselor will be in contact to schedule an intake appointment within 30 days.

Here is a list of documents that, if available, are important to have at the intake appointment DRS-VR counselor intake appointment: An original identification verification document, such as a driver’s license, passport, or state ID, and/or birth certificate; an original Social Security Card, permanent residency card (or green card), or official original Visa. If an individual is currently receiving Social Security benefits, whether SSI or SSDI, it is important to have a copy of the award letter from Social Security; also, medical records, which could include any letters or documentation from healthcare providers that documents a disability or disabling condition; employment-related documents, which could be a resume or list of jobs that held in the past; school information, which could include school transcripts from high school/college; documentation or certificates from employment-related trainings; and, finally, any proof of income such as pay stubs or tax records.

In addition to all of these documents, counselors consider an individual’s daily life, including how the person moves around the house, how he or she travels in the community, and his or her ability to participate in major life activities and perform specific tasks.

Core VR services. If after the meeting with the VR counselor, the applicant is determined eligible for VR, he/she may receive the following services at no cost: assessment to determine VR needs, vocational counseling and guidance, referral for other services, restoration, vocational training, maintenance and transportation, travel and mobility support, and interpreter services.

Core VR services, continued. Once an Individualized Plan for Employment, or IPE, is created, there are 22 services that DRS-VR can offer to clients according to their needs. For example, VR provides reader services for individuals who are Blind, services to assist students with disabilities in their transition from school to work, personal assistance services, rehabilitation technology services, supported employment services, tools and equipment, and job placement assistance.

Through a combination of these VR services, DRS supports each client’s employment goal. It takes 90 days of continuous employment to be considered a successful employment outcome.

Closing a VR case. There are a few situations in which a person’s VR case may be closed. First, when a client has had a successful outcome and maintained 90 days of employment in one job situation, his or her VR case may be closed. DRS-VR usually does not close a case until the client and counselor discuss it. However, if multiple attempts are made by DRS-VR to contact the client but the client cannot be reached, the case will be closed. If a client’s case is closed, he or she may reapply to VR at any time.

In order to demonstrate how VR services may be used by a refugee with a disability, we’ll share a successful VR case example:

“Sonam is a 25-year-old Deaf Bhutanese refugee who arrived in Chicago after living in a refugee camp in Nepal for 20 years with her parents. She now lives with her two older brothers.

Since her arrival in the U.S., Sonam has been receiving social services from a South Asian non-profit agency, where she is taking an ESL class. She is fluent in Nepalese. She does not use sign language but can read lips. Sonam submitted an online referral form to DRS. She met with a VR counselor, who contacted her within 30 days.”

VR case example, continued:

“A Nepalese interpreter was present to help facilitate the conversation at DRS. Prior to this meeting, Sonam was unaware that she might qualify for a job or job training opportunities in this country.

After the initial meeting with the VR counselor, Sonam’s case was opened and she was approved to take sign language classes and explore job training opportunities. As Sonam enjoys cooking spicy curry dishes, her VR counselor helped her enroll in the 16-week chef training program at the Chinese American Service League in Chinatown. After she completes the training, she will be placed in a culinary job.”

This slide contains useful links for DHS and the DRS online application.

Illinois WorkNet Centers/American Job Centers are another resource that partners with DRS-VR to support job seekers with disabilities.

Here is a fictional case example involving Illinois WorkNet Centers to give you a sense of how a refugee with a disability may use Illinois WorkNet Centers’ resources and services in order to achieve their employment goals.

Illinois WorkNet Centers - Case Example 1:

“Adelaide, a 60-year-old transgender refugee from Afghanistan, has severe rheumatoid arthritis and a history of depression following an abusive marriage. She has lived in the DuPage area for the past 10 years.

Adelaide has recently been laid off from her job as a receptionist at a dental office. Now she would like to change fields and pursue a career in domestic violence counseling for refugees. She has heard about Illinois WorkNet Center services from a former co-worker.

Adelaide attends a Workforce Center group orientation, where she learns about a Domestic Violence Advocacy training offered through a partner agency. After the training, the WorkNet Center connects her with a counseling program at the College of DuPage so that she can become a certified counselor.”

PRIDE has a partnership with Business and Career Services, Inc., or BCS. BCS operates the Arlington Heights American Job Center, an Illinois WorkNet Center.

What are Illinois WorkNet Centers? Illinois WorkNet Centers/American Job Centers are non-profit agencies that provide a wide array of employment services. They offer job seekers and businesses efficient and effective recruitment, hiring, and training expertise and assistance. They also offer a wide range of employment resources, tools, training workshops, career counseling, and networking opportunities. Illinois WorkNet Centers serve as a bridge to an extensive network of employment opportunities and Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) approved trainings.

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, or WIOA. So, what is WIOA? The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act aims to help job seekers and workers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and match employers with skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy. Funding for WIOA is from the Federal Department of Labor.

What groups benefit from Illinois WorkNet Center services? Illinois WorkNet Centers serve a wide range of groups, including employers, job seekers, veterans, youth, and people with disabilities.

Business and Career Services, Inc., or BCS, is a PRIDE partner that operates an Illinois WorkNet Center in Arlington Heights, Illinois. BCS provides the following services: on-site computer workshops, employment workshops, on-site recruitment events, job referral and placement services, funding for occupational training, internship opportunities and paid work experiences for young adults ages 18-24, referrals to community support services, and disability resources such as the Ticket to Work program. These services can supplement those offered by DRS-VR.

This slide contains contact information for Business and Career Services, Inc., as well as a link to their website for additional information.

We’ll conclude the module with a second Illinois WorkNet Centers case example.

“Stepan, a 60-year-old refugee from Bosnia, originally resettled in Colorado but later moved to northern Cook County, Illinois, to be closer to his son. He has medical issues that affect his heart that have required him to be fitted with a pacemaker. Stepan has been unemployed for the past 5 years.

Prior to being unemployed, Stepan owned his own business and was earning approximately $30,000 per year in Colorado. Now that his health is stable, Stepan wants to go back to work but realizes that he needs some additional training to pursue his dream of becoming a building engineer.”

Illinois WorkNet Centers - Case Example 2, continued:

“In an effort to obtain this training, Stepan researched several possibilities and found information pertaining to the Illinois WorkNet Center.

Further investigation provided the opportunity for Stepan to attend a WIOA Orientation, where he learned more about training, education, and employment. Stepan was able to enroll in the program, which allowed him to go to school and fulfill his dream of becoming a building engineer. Upon completion of the training, Stepan received employment services and was able to find a position with a major company as a maintenance technician.”

Finally, this slide lists the sources used in this module. Special thanks to DRS Director Quinetta Wade for narrating the DRS-VR content in this presentation. And thank you for completing PRIDE Provider Module #3.