100 Years of Investing in America

Public Law 93-112
93rd Congress, H. R. 8070
September 26, 1973

An Act

To provide the Vocational Rehabilitation Act, to extend and revise the allocation of grants to states for vocational rehabilitation services, with an emphasis on services to those with the most severe handicaps, to expand Federal responsibilities and research and training programs with respect to handicapped individuals, to foster Health, Education, and Welfare for coordination of all programs with respect to handicapped individuals within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, and for other purposes.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That this Act--the following table of contents, may be cited as the "Rehabilitation Act of 1973":

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TITLE I--VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES
100 Years of Investing in America

Dear Friends,

This year marks 100 years since a major milestone in our nation’s history—the establishment of America’s public vocational rehabilitation (VR) program. Since 1920, this program has remained true to its founding premise that Americans with disabilities who want to work can work and have access to the services and supports to enable them to do so.

While its guiding premise remains the same, VR has evolved over the years to respond to changing public needs. Originally created by Congress to assist only people with physical disabilities, today the program serves people with a range of disabilities. It also pioneered the dual-customer approach to workforce development, working to understand the needs of business and meet them with qualified candidates as well as consultation and technical assistance.

In addition, as a core component of the nation’s public workforce system, VR actively collaborates with public and community partners and helps inform and shape federal and state disability employment policy and practice. In fact, as the historical timeline in this issue of Investing in America illustrates, a partnership approach has been a hallmark of VR from the start.

As the collective voice for chief administrators of state VR agencies, the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) is proud to celebrate VR’s centennial and use the occasion to showcase its value to individuals, employers and communities across the U.S. for the past 100 years. In that spirit, we hope you enjoy this look back at the events that shaped the program over the past 100 years as well as examples of its impact as of late. Of course, we also hope you’ll join us in supporting VR’s ongoing success—Today, Tomorrow, Together.

Stephen A. Wooderson
CEO, CSAVR
CSAVR’s National Employment Team (NET) is recognizing CVS Health for its long-term partnership and commitment to the recruitment, hiring, training, advancement and retention of employees with disabilities. The partnership dates back to 2004, when CVS Health participated in a business forum sponsored by CSAVR. That forum led to the creation of the NET. CVS Health was at the table then and has been an integral partner since, providing training and guidance to assist in strengthening the NET’s dual-customer approach. Reflecting its commitment, CVS Health recently worked with CSAVR to produce a video, aptly titled “Abilities in Abundance,” that highlights the benefits of its partnership with VR—a partnership the NET looks forward to building upon in the years ahead.

To produce “Abilities in Abundance,” CVS Health partnered with CSAVR to engage Engelman Associates, LLC, a disability-owned marketing firm based in Bismarck, North Dakota that focuses on helping its clients—among them several VR agencies and other disability-related programs—share their successes through effective storytelling. The video has been used by CVS Health internally, to strengthen its employer brand, as well as externally, to illustrate to other companies the benefits of partnering with VR from both the individual and organizational perspective. Engelman Associates was co-founded by Harley Engelman, former Business Relations Administrator for the North Dakota Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (NDDVR). During his time at NDDVR, Engelman assisted in developing a nationwide brand marketing plan for the NET.
Driving Forward in Utah

Travis Telford sought VR services in Brigham City, Utah as a condition of parole following 23 years of incarceration. Working together with multiple entities, including his probation and parole officers and mental health service providers, Travis’s VR counselor helped him chart a path forward. Having never used a cell phone or the Internet, Travis feared he did not have applicable skills; however, he was eager to learn and rebuild his life. After exploring his strengths and interests, he chose to become a truck driver. The first step was obtaining his commercial driver’s license. VR then assisted in ensuring Travis’s prospective employer could participate in the Federal Bonding Program. Upon securing full-time employment in January 2019, Travis recounted his journey, simply stating, “Thank you for giving me a brighter future.”

Combining the Ingredients for Success

Sasha Ferguson grew up cooking at her grandmother’s side. As a young person with autism, she found it helped her focus and control her anxiety. Now, with support from Alaska’s Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, she’s parlaying her childhood hobby into a career. Sasha is a student at the Alaska Culinary Academy, an accredited program of the Alaska Vocational Technical Center. After completing her studies, she plans to gain real-world experience and then pursue further training to become a pastry chef. To other young people with disabilities, she offers sage advice. “Get outside your comfort zone and be willing to put yourself out there,” she says. For her, this meant being open about her disability and explaining to her instructors what accommodations she needed. If Sasha’s experience is any indication, it’s a recipe for success.
Raising Expectations in the Evergreen State

A resident of Washington State, Chris Walden began working in sheltered employment right after graduating high school in 1991. Although his employer helped him switch to an integrated environment at one point, the job was solitary, and he returned after discovering that he did not like to work alone. Washington State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) then stepped in, providing counseling and guidance to help him understand his skills, interests and abilities. With an approved plan for employment, DVR then provided placement assistance, and not long after, Chris began working as a service contractor providing grounds maintenance and janitorial services for Ackermann Electric in Mount Vernon, Washington. Once on the job, DVR provided job coaching and other supports to ensure he understood his job tasks and met expected performance levels.

Prepping for a Better Future

A young woman from Kankakee, Illinois, Raeshetia Cook has mental illness and is also hard of hearing. After she was referred to Thresholds, one of the oldest and largest service providers for people with mental health conditions in the state, the organization’s Kankakee Individual Placement and Support team assisted Raeshetia to prepare for and seek employment. Within two months, she was offered a job as a Food Prep worker at a Panera Bread bakery-café. As part of the process, her VR counselor helped arrange for interpreter services to help her train for the job and connected her with an audiologist, who in turn facilitated her getting hearing aids to help her manage better on the job. Clearly, Raeshetia managed very well—so much so that she was promoted from Food Prep to Line Cook during her 90-day probation period.
Creating a Vision of Employment

Each summer, Massachusetts Commission for the Blind’s (MCB) internship program helps college students from across the Commonwealth strengthen their vision for the future. Through the program, students spend six to eight weeks interning with public- and private-sector employers, such as Dunkin Brands, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and State Street Corporation, to name just a few. About 90 students participate annually, based on a competitive process. While MCB’s vocational rehabilitation counselors help facilitate matches, students interview directly with employers to ensure a good fit. Prior to starting work, they also take part in a formal orientation program comprising mobility training as well as a refresher on “soft” skills. Once on the job, they receive ongoing support from MCB, including any assistive technology needed. Interns are not the only ones who benefit from the program, however. Participating employers gain insight into the skills and talents people who are blind offer their organization. They also often gain future employees. At completion, 70 percent of participants are on track for permanent employment.

Putting the Transition Pieces Together

For many people, the prospect of graduating high school is simultaneously exciting and stressful. For some transitioning youth in Nevada, however, the latter is lessened through an innovative program that helps students with disabilities learn more about what to expect and explore their options going forward. Sponsored by the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation in collaboration with a range of community partners, the Careers, Recreation and Vocational Education (CRAVE) camp convenes students with disabilities together for one week of activities, both formal and fun, designed to build skills for future education and employment success. Originally held only at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, the program recently expanded to the University of Nevada, Reno, allowing a more diverse and larger population to participate. In addition to the urban areas of Las Vegas and Reno, campers have increasingly come from the state’s rural communities such as Elko, Spring Creek, Winnemucca and Yerington. About 80 youth have participated in the past two years.
CSAVR developed the National Employment Team (NET) in response to a discussion with its business customers, understanding that the development of career strategies that result in the hiring, promotion and retention of people with disabilities depends not only on their vocational goals and interests, but also the employment needs and environment of the business. Based on feedback from business customers, CSAVR structured the NET as a cross-state team of Business Relations Representatives who collaborate, but also function as single points of contact for the VR agency at the state level. The NET’s infrastructure facilitates a team approach to support individual businesses of all sizes. The goal is to develop ongoing relationships with and provide a variety of services to businesses, in addition to referring and supporting the retention of individuals who acquire disabilities during their employment lifecycle. The CSAVR-NET partnered with disABLEdperson and customers to develop a centralized talent pool of candidates with disabilities, known as the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP).
1938

WAGNER-O’DAY ACT
The Wagner-O’Day Act requires the federal government to fund demonstration projects to rehabilitate people who were formerly employed and who have lost employment because of industrial accidents or occupational diseases. The federal government underwrites the costs of distribution and administration. By 1939, these programs included those to exclude services as well as to provide income for workers with other significant disabilities.

1932

SMITH-FESS ACT/ CIVILIAN VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION ACT
President Harding signs the Smith-Fess Act, also known as the Civilian Vocational Rehabilitation Act, establishing a public civilian program to fund vocational rehabilitation services to disabled veterans. It is an extension of earlier legislation providing civilian vocational rehabilitation services to disabled civilians, including Smith-Fess Rehabilitation Act of 1918 and only serves people who were blind. It also introduces a new funding scheme, requires states to identify the people who are blind, and only a small number accessed the program. The National Council of State Agencies for Rehabilitation (NCSAB) is incorporated. The Council of State Executives authorizes a forerunner of the National Rehabilitation Council for the Blind—a forerunner of the National Council of State Administrators for Rehabilitation (NCSAB) and the National Rehabilitation Councils into state VR agencies to provide more services for people with visual impairments.

1936

RANDOLPH-SHEPPARD ACT
The Randolph-Sheppard Act provides an organization through which people who are blind receive training and access to jobs in federal buildings. It also authorizes and establishes a forerunner of VR agencies to serve people with physical disabilities. It also includes specific requirements that states coordinate with workers’ compensation commissions and agencies serving veterans.

1940

STATES VR COUNCIL
The States Vocational Rehabilitation Council, a forerunner of the Council of State Administrators for Rehabilitation (CSAVR), establishes an ongoing formal process for organizing, coordinating, and evaluating services for people who are blind. This period is the beginning of the federal government’s role in ensuring that people with disabilities have access to the services they need to lead productive lives.

1944

COUNCIL OF STATE EXECUTIVE SERVICES FOR THE BLIND
The Council of State Executives for the Blind—a forerunner of the National Council of State Administrators for the Blind (NCSAB)—is formed to advise the Administration of VR services to individuals with visual disabilities.

1954

VR ACT AMENDMENTS are signed, defining the scope of the VR program, mandating that people with intellectual and developmental disabilities be provided federal funding for VR, with annual increases in appropriations.

1965

VR ACT AMENDMENTS expand the services VR provides. VR services include social services for people with visual impairments.

1975

NCSCB is incorporated.

1984

ADA SIGNING
The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, bringing sweeping changes to VR and helping to bring people with the most significant disabilities into the workforce. It also requires greater use of pre-employment services, including the provision of training and job placement assistance, to help people with disabilities find and keep jobs.

1998

A90
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) serves to eliminate discrimination against people with disabilities in the provision of public services, employment, and other areas, including the workplace. It also requires that all public entities and facilities that receive federal funds must be accessible to and usable by people with disabilities.

2004

BUSINESS PARTNER FORUMS
Based on information gained during forum and subsequent forums, CSAVR formulates a model for a “dual-customer” approach, which is now the standard model. The model is implemented in the National Employment Team (NET), a group tasked with the responsibility of identifying and implementing best practices in VR.

2020

100 YEARS OF INVESTING IN AMERICA
The national VR program celebrates the next steps in VR. CSAVR implements an advocacy for a strong, effective VR program. CSAVR implements the “Projects for Business Partners” program and realizes the importance of engaging businesses in order to identify long-term solutions to the challenges facing people with disabilities.

America Needs

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION: 100 Years of Investing in America

As the economy began to recover, new homes emerged as a result of a series of government programs established between 1932 and 1940. In 1940, the housing program was still underfunded through 1942, and the War Department contracted for housing on a limited scale, typically for five to ten years in total.

The “New Deal” was characterized by a number of reforms aimed at improving the economy and reducing the impact of the Great Depression. The New Deal included the establishment of the Works Progress Administration (WPA), which funded a number of projects to provide employment opportunities for individuals affected by the economic downturn.

The New Deal was also characterized by the establishment of the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), which provided employment opportunities for young people through conservation projects. The CCC was a large-scale federal program that employed young men and women in conservation-related activities, including roadbuilding, soil conservation, and forest management.

The New Deal was also characterized by the establishment of the Social Security Act, which provided a safety net for the elderly, the disabled, and the unemployed. The Social Security Act established a system of social insurance that provided benefits for individuals who had worked and contributed to the system throughout their working lives.

The New Deal was also characterized by the establishment of the Wagner-O’Day Act, which required the federal government to fund demonstration projects to rehabilitate people who were formerly employed and who lost employment due to industrial accidents or occupational diseases. This act was a forerunner of the Civilian Vocational Rehabilitation Act, which was enacted in 1932.

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Leading Change Through a Collective Voice

The Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) is a membership organization comprising the 78 chief administrators of the public vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies that annually serve approximately one million people with disabilities throughout the U.S. These agencies constitute the state partners in the state-federal program of rehabilitation services mandated by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, with the U.S. Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration serving as the federal partner.

The Vision 2020 initiative represents a reaffirmation on the part of state VR agencies to ensure their programs and services are proactive, respond to the principles of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and serve as models in the disability employment community. It is a strategic planning process through which state VR agency leaders, under the collective umbrella of CSAVR, are working together to assess progress and guide the profession as the system celebrates its 100-year anniversary in 2020.