

★ Vocational Rehabilitation: From good to great

The goals of vocational rehabilitation are independence, meaningful activity and reintegration. Practitioners in this field are knowledgeable and resilient, with a raft of skills to meet the challenges of returning people to work. Gabrielle O'Connell writes.



Vocational rehabilitation is an expanding area of career practice. The key motivators for working in this field are big picture values including the rights of citizenship, the value of work, health and wellbeing, and promoting a diverse, more inclusive and just society.

The primary goal of vocational rehabilitation is to assist individuals with disabilities gain or regain their independence through employment or some form of meaningful activity, and reintegration into society (Parker & Szymanski, 2003; Rubin & Roessler, 1995).

There are many job titles describing various aspects of vocational rehabilitation – employment consultant, occupational assessment, case manager, work broker, vocational consultant, placement co-ordinator, rehabilitation counsellor, to name a few.

The United States Commission on Rehabilitation Counseling Certification (CRCC) identifies the centrality of a broad range of rehabilitation disciplines and processes. Research on the evolution of vocational rehabilitation competencies in Australia considered job function, knowledge areas in terms of importance and frequency (Matthews, L.R., et al., undated). Six main factors were identified: vocational counselling, professional practice, personal counselling, rehabilitation case management, work place disability case management and work place intervention and programme management.

For many CDANZ members vocational rehabilitation service activities are weighted towards pre-employment skills, short term training, securing work trials and employment. Micro counselling skills, industry knowledge and relationship management with stakeholders, together with personal attributes of resilience, advocacy and work that aligns with our personal values help to bring about success in this work.

There are frustrations associated with trying to meet the voc rehab goals of independence, meaningful activity and reintegration. At a macro level the role of the state in the welfare of citizens, privatisation, legislative requirements and fiscal restraints impact on our work. Barriers to the employment, a lack of meaningful work, a lack of skilled work or work with good career prospects, financial pressure from work placements ending, and standardised contracts are daily challenges. The skills we develop to overcome these challenges include counselling, educating, mediating and negotiation, networking and relationship management, conflict resolution, report writing and administration. I would urge CDANZ to consider these skills when planning professional development activities for members.

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References:

- International Encyclopedia of Rehabilitation <http://cirrie.buffalo.edu/encyclopedia/en/article/128/>
- Matthews, L.R., Buys, N., Randall, C, Biggs, H and Pearce, Z, undated. Evolution of vocational rehabilitation competencies in Australia http://www98.griffith.edu.au/dspace/bitstream/handle/10072/33229/63625_1.pdf?sequence=1