

Promising Practices...

Quality employment for disabled veterans

"July 26 marks the 19th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)...the ADA's provisions include the right to seek, obtain, pursue and maintain employment without being hampered by physical or attitudinal barriers. I believe that having a job is a civil right. Those who are qualified for and want to work should not be denied that right because of an inaccessible building or an outdated set of assumptions about what they can or cannot do. Unfortunately, the employment rate for people with disabilities in this country is unacceptably low: 22.6% of individuals with disabilities in our country are participating in the labor force, compared to 71.9% of persons with no disability."

Statement by Secretary of Labor Hilda L. Solis
July 24, 2009

Disability Program Navigators (DPNs) across the nation create valuable support strategies for job seekers with disabilities, both within and outside of the workforce investment system. The Promising Practices series provides insight into these strategies, as well as methods for you to foster more successful partnerships and to assist more people with disabilities achieve positive employment outcomes.

Assisting Veterans Achieve Success in the 21st Century Workplace

According to the U.S. Census in 2007, of the 23.6 million military veterans in the United States, 6 million had disabilities. In addition, an increasing number of disabled veterans will be returning from combat in Afghanistan and Iraq with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and other mental and physical disabilities resulting from their tours of duty. Navigating the numerous veteran and civilian services, understanding them and utilizing them effectively are major challenges for any individual. If the One-Stop Career Centers are to meet the challenges of serving the increasing number of disabled veterans seeking employment services, there needs to be collaboration and coordination between the public workforce investment system and programs that serve disabled veterans.

Joining Forces to Support Disabled Veterans

The primary veterans program within the workforce investment system is the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS). Effective January 19, 2009, the VETS program issued a final rule on priority of service in qualified DOL job training programs for veterans. According to the final rule, "One-Stop Career Centers are the delivery point for a significant percentage of qualified job training programs and services covered by the Jobs for Veterans Act and are required to implement priority of service". Implementation of priority of service is designed to provide veterans and eligible spouses with clear entry points into high-growth, high wage civilian jobs and easily accessible post-secondary education and training. The goal is to support their advancement along career pathways that benefit veterans, their families, and regional economies.

Contact Us

For a list of DPN contacts by state/territory, visit www.doleta.gov/disability
For more information, including tools and resources, visit dpnavigator.net

The VETS agency administers the Disabled Veterans Outreach Program (DVOP) and Local Veterans Employment Representative (LVER) staffing. DVOP/LVER staff is located within the One-Stop Career Centers. They promote the business case for employing disabled veterans to employers and provide assistance to veterans in need of intensive training and employment.

DPNs are also located in One-Stop Career Centers and develop successful strategies by partnering with LVER/DVOP staff to provide access to the full array of services available to disabled veterans. DPNs are knowledgeable in areas that DVOPs/LVERs are not. Such areas may include assistive technology, workplace accommodations, information on Social Security benefits and work incentives available through Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWIC). The DPNs have been supporting the One-Stop Career Centers in actively implementing priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses. The DPNs' wide array of contacts in public and private organizations can help disabled veterans with employment-related needs such as job coaching, independent living skills training, work-related expenses (tools, clothing, etc.) and/or transportation options.

In addition to establishing connections with employers and across service systems, DPNs can facilitate the establishment of disability advisory committees and Integrated Resource Teams (IRTs) designed to address challenges to employment for an individual job seeker. An IRT, formed to serve a disabled veteran, would include the job seeker and the DVOP/LVER, and may include Veterans Affairs Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Service (VR&E), vocational rehabilitation staff, the local housing liaison and/or a community mental health provider. This team works together to identify and strategize on how their combined services and resources will benefit and support the job seeker's employment goals.

“Working as a team is the only thing that’s keeping us going out here. Our funding is going away, so it’s essential that we start talking to each other.”

-- Dave Howerton, DVOP Idaho

Spotlight: The Idaho DPNs and DVOPs/LVERs Experience

The Challenge: Increased demand for services with decreasing funds

The Idaho Department of Labor One-Stop Career Centers experienced a dramatic increase in requests from veterans for services and needed additional resources to serve these men and women. However, traditional funding resources to support veteran services was decreasing and finding new sources of support to help bridge looming service delivery gaps was critical. The sheer increase in numbers required additional assistance to evaluate the needs of incoming service men and women, as well as help in managing all of the veteran-targeted events held in the area.

The Solution: Partner to reduce overlap in services and share knowledge

Since many of the veterans were returning with service-connected disabilities, the DPN became a natural ally to the DVOP/LVER staff to provide seamless services for disabled veterans across the state. A typical starting point for collaboration in some local areas involved DPN and DVOPs/LVERs jointly meeting with individual disabled veterans to help develop solutions for their employment challenges. In other areas, DPNs were initially brought in to provide awareness on available Social Security work incentives.

The partnerships between DPNs and DVOPs/LVERs progressed as they joined forces to improve the quality of events targeted to veterans across the state. As the relationship between the DPNs and DVOPs/LVERs expanded beyond information sharing, basic guidelines emerged and proposed actions consistently aimed to:

- » Create a benefit to the job seeker that would not otherwise occur.
- » Expand resource capacity or reduce overlap in services.
- » Provide greater benefit at less cost (staff time, materials, etc).

The Results:

The results of these collaborative efforts were noteworthy because the DVOPs/LVERs developed a broad knowledge of the public and private agencies that provide services to individuals with disabilities along with a whole new toolkit of resources, contacts and information. Likewise, the DPNs learned about valuable veteran resources, such as the National Veterans' Training Institute (NVTI) and the National Resource Directory (NRD) for Wounded, Ill and Injured Service Members and Veterans. Valuable lessons learned include the following:

“The DPN really has been a key position because the vet rep – we don’t always have time. We’re spending time one-to-one in a local office, out there trying to make employer contacts to develop more job listings, usually working with veterans service organizations. Now we’ve added these non-governmental organizations or public service organizations, different volunteer organizations that can have a lot to offer that we can network with and expand our horizons.”

-- David Hoag, LVER Idaho

- » Take time to build trust by looking for opportunities to collaborate and following through on commitments.
- » Maintain communication and regularly share information, resources and connections with other workforce partners, stakeholders and employers.
- » Co-facilitate introductions on new and appropriate services to disabled veterans.
- » Consult, on a regular basis, on information regarding reasonable accommodations, Social Security disability benefits and employment opportunities.
- » Engage in outreach activities together that target disabled veterans with multiple employment challenges with groups such as veterans programs, homeless shelters, faith-based organizations, corrections facilities and work release programs, substance abuse clinics and mental health facilities.
- » Conduct joint presentations to both veterans groups and disability organizations on using the workforce investment system.
- » Gain support and involvement from the One-Stop Career Center management and keep other program staff informed of coordinated efforts.

Case Studies

Focus on Mr. D – “A Fast & Successful Transition to Employment”

The DPNs in Idaho have made it a priority to join forces with DVOPs/LVERs and other workforce investment program staff to meet the employment needs of returning disabled veterans. This diligence and coordination of efforts paid off for Mr. D. A LVER met Mr. D prior to his official discharge at a Transitional Assistance Program for Soldiers (TAPS) meeting. The LVER had brought along an employer who was interested in tapping into the pool of returning veterans with skills in aviation and airline mechanics. Mr. D possessed some of these skills and introductions were made. Soon after his official discharge, the LVER met with Mr. D. At this time, Mr. D disclosed a hearing loss due to his military jobs and revealed that he was collecting veterans disability benefits. The LVER wanted to determine whether Mr. D would be a good candidate for WIA funding. Would he need any additional support services or accommodations? Did he have the skills and experience to meet the needs of the employer? As a known resource on disability, the LVER asked the DPN to help him find answers to these questions. Mr. D would need a specific license to be fully qualified for the airline mechanic position the employer was looking to fill. The LVER knew that Mr. D's extensive experience in the Air Force would allow him to test for this license without further training and set that process in motion. Mr. D followed through diligently and agreed to pass the oral and written exams for the license within the first six months of his employment.

The final step was to coordinate a meeting between Mr. D and the employer as soon as possible. An upcoming job fair for veterans, a coordinated effort by the LVER, DVOP and DPN, was the perfect time and setting. At the job fair, Mr. D was offered the job on the spot. He was enrolled in WIA Intensive Services without delay and expenses were paid for all required tools. As a result of Mr. D's high motivation and the fast paced teamwork of the LVER and DPN, this disabled veteran was not passed over for this high-skilled, high-paying job within only months of his discharge.

Focus on Mr. C – “Multiple Challenges, Multiple Sources of Support”

Mr. C was soon to be released from a Utah corrections facility and would be transferring to probation and parole in Vermont. Since the DPNs in Vermont had established significant connections with the prisons and work release programs across the state, one DPN received a call. The DPN regularly participated on a committee for parole officers to help determine plans-of-action for incarcerated individuals prior to their release. This collaboration resulted in many referrals to the One-Stop Career Centers, including Mr. C. When the DPN learned that Mr. C was a veteran, he partnered with his One-Stop Career Center's LVER to evaluate the job seeker's employment needs. In working with Mr. C and his probation officer, the DPN and LVER learned about the multiple challenges he was facing. Mr. C had a past that involved recurring violence and substance abuse issues. He had undergone disciplinary problems while in the service and was dishonorably discharged. Furthermore, Mr. C expressed symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other possible mental health issues that could impact his ability to retain employment.

The DPN and LVER held a meeting to discuss resources to help Mr. C secure and retain employment. Immediately, referrals were made to the local substance abuse and mental health agency, where Mr. C agreed to attend a program three times a week to address his violent behavior. Prompt assistance was also provided to obtain Food Stamps. The LVER connected Mr. C with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to help him appeal for a discharge upgrade to increase employability.

Meanwhile, the DPN helped to develop a job with a local roofing company since Mr. C had prior experience in the industry. Through Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funding, half of Mr. C's salary for on-the-job training would be paid for two months. When Mr. C was offered the roofing position, Vocational Rehabilitation paid for work clothing and gas money and shared the cost of the on-the-job training for one month. After one and a half years, Mr. C is still working as a roofer for the same company.

Resources

DPN Resources

- » www.doleta.gov/disability
- » www.dpnavigator.net

Veterans-Related Resources

- » U.S. Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service
www.dol.gov/vets
 - Fact Sheet – Priority of Service
www.dol.gov/vets/Fact Sheet - Priority of Service Final Rule.doc
- » U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
www.va.gov
- » National Resource Directory (NRD) – An Online Partnership for Wounded, Ill, and Injured Service Members, Veterans, Their Families and Those Who Support Them
www.nationalresourcedirectory.org
- » National Veterans Training Institute (NVTI)
www.nvti.cudenver.edu

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