**Emerging Practice**

**Title: Use of the Integrated Resource Team (IRT) Strategy in Virginia**

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**Source:** (please provide specific reference)

1. Research Project
2. Journal Article
3. Other Center
4. **Information Gathered from VR Programs**
5. Intensive TA Provision
6. Other

**Highlights:**

1. The VR agency in Virginia uses the Integrated Resource Team (IRT) strategy with Job Center partners in a process that is unique to each customer’s needs, while taking advantage of the diverse expertise and creativity of the participating professionals.
2. Dr. Joseph Ashley, Assistant Commissioner of Virginia DARS, provides three examples of customer service to demonstrate how the IRT works in Virginia.
3. This strategy has been piloted in several regions, and provides the opportunity for VR expertise to lead to engagement of people with disabilities in Career Pathways and access other services available through America’s Job Centers. This is a strategy for leveraging and braiding resources.

**Description:**

Since the Work Incentive Grant in 2000, the VR System has worked as a “core partner” of the Job Center system, recognizing the benefits of a more responsive labor exchange system to job seekers with disabilities to the individuals served, to the state of Virginia, and to VR as an agency. Through multiple initiatives over the years, the state Vocational Rehabilitation agency in Virginia has worked with the other required one-stop agencies to create stronger employment outcomes for people with disabilities. In that time, the VR agency has co-located in the Job Centers, addressed the physical and program access in the centers and worked with their partners to add tools and strategies, including the Job Center operation as an employment network and the addition of “benefits advisement” services (what might be known elsewhere as CWIC or benefits planning services) in the Job Center on a full-time basis.

One of the strategies that the Virginia VR system has built upon with its partner agencies is the “integrated resource team” or IRT strategy. This is a strategy promoted nationally through the Disability Employment Initiative (DEI), and Virginia’s Job Centers are a model for success with this strategy with the leadership the VR agency has provided.

From Dr. Joseph Ashley, Assistant Commissioner, Virginia Department on Aging and Rehabilitative Services:

I have attached the three IRT examples I used at the National Convening. The first highlights how the Disability Resource Coordinator (DRC) made a difference in the success of an individual with a disability with a ticket as well as ex-offender. He had started with Title I and received his truck driver training/Commercial Driver’s License but was not able to secure employment. The DRC at that time had worked for VR as a placement counselor and knew to check employers who needed the commercial driver’s license and were willing to hire ex-offenders.  She also spent much time on practice interviews and developed a response to the question about the felony conviction. The second issue arose when the individual began to work and resulted in overpayment and other issues with Medicaid and Social Services, due to lack of reporting. The DRC had changed and was trained (in the use of SSA work incentives) and was able to address these issues. All of these services were required by this individual to be successful, and he is still working with full benefits.

The second example I included to demonstrate that the process can be sustained even after the grant is over in that particular area. In this case, the VR counselor housed in the One-Stop had been a Disability Program Navigator (DPN) and helped us implement the IRT process in Virginia. The individual came in to ask for services to switch careers. A screening tool indicated that she might benefit from a VR referral due to multiple disability-related barriers. In this case, VR took the lead and the individual was co-enrolled in Title I services and VR. There were multiple IRTs and partners involved in the successful outcome for this career seeker.

The third example involves a One-Stop Center with a permanent disability specialist. The Title I program engaged the Disability Specialist, who then involved a VR counselor. They then included the trainer as a part of their IRT. This demonstrated that it often takes multiple partners to create successful outcomes. It also demonstrates that customized placements are possible, such as in this case, a CNA placement that can accommodate physical restrictions due to the heart transplant.

The common denominator across all of these successful placements was multiple IRTs, multiple partner agency staff investment, even beyond the workforce partners, and clients that were motivated and willing to be a part of the process.

**Virginia**

**Integrated Resource Team (IRT) – Success Stories**

**IRT Example 1**

**Background**

* 50-year-old male
* Education – High School Graduate
* Employment History: Construction Work
* Received WIA intensive services
* Ticket Holder
* Veteran

**Challenges**

* Unemployed over a year: unsuccessful at obtaining employment after completing CDL training
* Ex-felon with drug/alcohol abuse
* Needed extra supports and how to explain felony
* Physical Disability: back problems and hip replacement, too hard to stand long periods of time
* Once working: Did not turn in pay stubs to SSA resulting in overpayments
* Did not tell Social Services that he was working and still receiving food stamps

**Strengths**

* Determined to succeed (acknowledged past mistakes)
* Very positive attitude
* Excellent student

**IRT Members**

* WIA, Disability Resource Coordinator (DRC) and Employment Network services

**IRT Outcomes**

* WIA-funded CDL Training and licensure, transportation vouchers for training, Dept. of Transportation physical and drug screening
* DRC provided successful job search with employers who hire ex-offenders, interview skills training to increase confidence and how to present felony conviction. Follow-up IRT with new DRC who addressed Ticket overpayments, Social Services concerning Food Stamps, and assisted with Medicaid appeal (DRC is a Work Incentives Specialist Advocate)

**Employed:** September 2012 – Permanent, Full Time at $12 per hour with health insurance/retirement benefits as a Truck Driver with the county

**Note:** Total Ticket to Work program payments = $8,106

**Virginia**

**Integrated Resource Team (IRT) – Success Stories**

**IRT Example 2**

**Background**

* 44-year-old female
* BA in Arts and Communication
* Receiving WIA Intensive services
* Completed One-Stop Common Intake form and referred to VR because of reported disability and functional limitations
* Employment history: Career developer/specialist for educational entities
* Seeking employment in an educational setting and needed certification due to desire to work with the local public school system

**Challenges**

* Frequent job loss because of functional limitations due to hidden disabilities
* Lack of knowledge regarding ADA and accommodations (did not acknowledge disabilities and impacts on employment)
* No transportation – vehicle repossession due to job loss
* Loss of insurance: not able to take psychotropic medication
* Mobility and manipulation challenges due to Fibromyalgia
* Attention-Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD)
* Depression and Bi-polar

**Strengths**

* Persistence
* Communication Skills
* Intellectual
* Teachable

**IRT Members**

* VR counselor IRT lead (located in the One-Stop and was previously a Disability Program Navigator), WIA Career Developer and One-Stop Manager, College Ombudsman, Special Education endorsement program staff, Public Schools, Paratransit, VR Assistive Technology engineer

**IRT Outcomes**

* WIA funded the Career Switchers Program at a local university (reached maximum WIA expenditure limit, so VR engaged next program).
* Special Education Endorsement program provided additional scholarship for certification classes and a provisional license so job seeker could fulfill a long term substitute position with public schools. That on the job experience assisted with completion of certification process.
* VR - Provided Counseling and Guidance, ADA self-advocacy training, completed application and certification process for transportation to/from home, work, school via Paratransit, purchased medication for employment stability, provided loaner computer for home to complete class assignments and referral to community mental health treatment resources.

**Employed:** July 2015 - Full Time, permanent position with Public Schools as a Special Education Instructor at $40,000 annually with benefits (health insurance and retirement)

**Virginia**

**Integrated Resource Team (IRT) – Success Stories**

**IRT Example 3**

**Background**

* 35-year-old female
* Education – High School graduate; 1 year Community College
* No previous employment
* Had worked with VR and a Ticket holder

**Challenges**

* Had not worked
* Transportation – had to use public transportation
* Physical disability – heart transplant (no heavy physical exertion)
* Learning Disability – needed accommodations
* Time management,p speed

**Strengths**

* Highly motivated
* Punctuality
* Capable of completing assigned tasks independently

**IRT Members**

* WIA, Disability Resource Coordinator (DRC), VR and Training provider

**IRT Outcomes**

* WIA funded the bulk of the CNA training program and tools (exceeded WIA training expenditure limit so DRC engaged VR for cost sharing and resource coordination)
* DRC used the First Dollar Down (flexible spending fund) for part of tuition, school supplies, and public transportation passes for the CNA training/first month of work. Referred to and paid for job seeker to meet with a WISA (work incentives) specialist to discuss how SSI would affect employment and which work incentives to use.
* VR paid the rest of the CNA training program and covered participation costs during the lecture portion of the training (e.g. provided a note taker, tape recorder, spelling/grammar assistive devices for the essay exams).
* Training provider became an IRT member. Due to the high quality of job seeker’s work, the provider recommended her to an Assisted Living Home position. DRC made the introduction and helped educate staff on effective low-cost accommodation strategies (e.g. assistive device to remind worker of scheduled events, reminders and spelling/grammar check on computer, taped versions of documents).

**Employed:** July 2013 - Full Time, permanent position with Assistive Living Home as a Certified Nursing Assistant at $12.50 and now at $15 per hour with full benefits

**Update:** Just purchased a car!

*“To take a leadership role in the One-Stop, you have to show up and do some of the work.” -- Dr. Joe Ashley, Assistant Commissioner, Virginia DARS*

**Evaluation and Potential Impact:**

People with significant disabilities are more likely than others to be engaged at a service level requiring case management in multiple service programs at the same time. There are two common issues with this that work against service outcomes for both the participant and for the agencies involved:

1. Unless there is a very deliberate effort by the agencies serving the participant to share their expertise and resources, there is a likelihood of establishing objectives that don’t align and strategies that work against each other – or that a very important resource is not engaged at all.
2. The complexity of the rules, eligibility, and accountability of each of the separate “programs” is very confusing for the person receiving the service, requiring more effort for the participant on being compliant in each of the separate programs than on reaching their objectives.

Both of these issues contribute to an individual being more dependent on program professionals for their success and less on their own ability to be successful. This situation leads to an individual remaining on a counselor’s caseload longer if the individual remains active in service until reaching his or her goals.

The use of the IRT strategy is seen in many circles as a vehicle for “braiding” resources for the benefit of the person served, but it is also a service process that braids expertise with the result of a common plan for an individual which is likely to make more sense to the person served, and more likely to be successful in a shorter period of time.

**For More Information:**

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