

FINAL REPORT

Submitted by:
Virginia Commonwealth University
Rehabilitation Research and Training Center's
State Government Initiative Promoting Partnerships and Employment
for Virginians with Disabilities

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The Virginia Board for People with Disabilities and
the U.S. Administration of Developmental Disabilities

FINAL PROJECT REPORT

a. Purpose of the Grant:

The purpose of the grant was to develop and implement an initiative promoting private and public partnerships in order to increase awareness and employment in state government agencies for people with disabilities. The core objectives of the grant were to continue a model created by Virginia Commonwealth University - Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports and Job Retention (VCU-RRTC) that partnered staffing organizations, individuals with disabilities and the private sector. The grant specifically sought to change attitudes and increase the knowledge among state agency personnel and state approved staffing managers and specialists contracted by the Commonwealth of Virginia resulting in the placement of more individuals with disabilities into long-term state employment.

b. Outcome Performance:

Objective 1: Establish a State Resolution that promotes hiring people with disabilities in state government.

Accomplishment: We believe this outcome to be extremely important and significant to the Commonwealth of Virginia. Governor Tim Kaine signed and released Executive Directive Number 8 on October 23, 2007.

Ed Turner, Senior Advisor on Disability Issues in the Workforce to Governor Kaine, was instrumental in securing approval for the Executive Directive by holding informational meetings and expediting the necessary paperwork through each step of the approval process. Executive Directive Number 8 requires each state agency to review all policies and procedures for recruiting and accommodating applicants with disabilities. In addition, all agencies are actively encouraged to hire qualified applicants with disabilities. Finally, the Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM) and the Secretary of Administration are required to file an annual progress report, documenting how VA state agencies are advancing the employment of people with disabilities.

VCU-RRTC and many others reviewed an annual reporting tool and offered revisions which were incorporated into the final version utilized in the 2008 reporting period. At the request from staff at the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPD) and the Governor's Senior Assistant on Disability Issues, additional revisions have been made to the reporting form. It was agreed that DHRM would incorporate the most recent changes by February, in time for the state agencies to report on 2009 progress.

In addition, DHRM has agreed to create a new Managing Virginia Program (MVP) module which will provide guidance and assistance to all new hires

and employees promoted to first line managers. DHRM anticipates the module will be completed and operational by July 1, 2009. This training module will focus on disability awareness issues and concerns and effective strategies for being proactive in the recruitment and hiring of applicants with disabilities. The MVP module is the second in a series of modules with the previous training devoted to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) from a compliance standpoint.

Finally, DHRM has posted the highly proclaimed VCU Disability Awareness on-line training course to their intranet website, for easy access by all employees. As of December 31, 2008 it was reported by DHRM that 415 state employees have initiated and successfully completed these course requirements.

In summary, these three major accomplishments include: 1) Executive Directive, 2) MVP, and 3) the Disability Awareness on-line course, reflect new policies and procedure changes which will have a positive impact on recruitment, hiring, accommodating, and advancement of job seekers and workers with disabilities.

Performance Measures: EM05 – Employment programs/policies created/improved

Target =1; Actual = 3

Consumer Participation: DHRM asked for feedback from people with disabilities and agencies who represent people with disabilities. Two major entities helped to secure consumer participation to include: 1) VBPD, and 2) Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS). Each will play an on-going support role to ensure that people with disabilities have a voice as future revisions are made.

Barriers: There are no major barriers to report. The project was concerned about the length of time it took to develop a final version of the Executive Directive and place it in the hands of the Governor. However, once Governor Kaine had the Executive Directive in his office for review it took a few weeks to have it signed and released.

Plan for Continuation: Executive Directive Number 8 will remain active even after the Governor departs from office and it will become a part of the on-going activities within DHRM.

Effective Strategies: Securing involvement from high level officials such as the Governor's Advisor on Workforce and Disability Issues and the Secretary of Administration proved to be extremely helpful in the accomplishment of this goal. In particular, it should be noted that Ed Turner was enormously helpful and completely dedicated to ensuring that appropriate approval was secured from all parties.

Objective 2: Placement of 20 people with disabilities through state approved staffing organizations or direct hire by a state agency; 10 will have developmental disabilities; 10 will remain employed 180 days.

Activity A: Work with Employment Service Organizations (ESOs) and state rehabilitation agencies to facilitate employment for people with disabilities in staffing organizations.

Activity B: Work with ESOs and state rehabilitation agencies to facilitate employment for people with disabilities in state agencies.

Accomplishment: State-Contracted Staffing Organizations -- The state-contracted staffing organizations collaborating on this project were Caliper, Abacus, and Maxim. In total, the project received 159 on-line referrals. Of the 159 on-line referrals there was a total of 110 individuals who actually registered with one of the staffing companies. Staffing organizations were responsible for 25 placements. The majority of the placements were in state agencies or institutions of higher education. However, some hiring was done at the local government agency level as well as in the public-private sector with notable outcomes at Abacus, Ashland Convalescent Center, Concentra Healthcare, Henrico County Health Department, and Hanover Economic Development Department.

Direct Hire -- During training conducted in the first quarter of the project it was learned that some state agencies do not use staffing organizations for recruitment and hiring assistance. Therefore, in order to capture the number of individuals with disabilities that were securing employment in state agencies (direct hires) it was ascertained that DRS and DVBI would have these data. DRS and DVBI agreed to submit to VCU-RRTC their monthly placement reports which included place of employment, position, and salary. These agencies reported that a total of 17 individuals with disabilities secured employment with state agencies or institutions of higher education.

Through the staffing organizations and direct hire, the project placed 42 individuals with disabilities into employment. Of those individuals 30 had developmental disabilities and 12 individuals had other disabilities. Fifteen individuals continued in employment for more than 180 days.

In addition to the number of individuals who secured employment as a result of this project, it should be noted that a significant number of business relationships were developed as a direct result of this project (see EM04 below). In total, 18 unique business relationships were developed to promote the employment of people with disabilities.

Performance Measures:

EM01 – Adults with disabilities have jobs of their choice

Target (staffing organizations) = 10 placements; Actual = 25

Target (direct hire) = 10; Actual = 17 placements

Total placements/hires = 42

Target = 10 will have DD; Actual = 30 had DD

Target = 10 remain 180 days; Actual 15 remain 180 days

EM04 – Businesses/employers employed adults with disabilities

Target = 0; Actual = 18

Demographics: State-Contracted Staffing Organizations -- Over the 24 months of the grant there were 159 individuals referred to the project through the on-line reporting format, with a total of 110 individuals completing the process and formally registering with a staffing company for placement assistance. Of the 110 individuals with disabilities who completed the registration process, 89 were females and 70 were males ranging in age from 18 to 59 years of age. A total of 75 individuals reported to experience a developmental disability.

Through the staffing organizations, 25 individuals with disabilities were placed into a variety of positions to include: registered nurse/LPN; medical assistant, administrative assistant, accountant, parking assistant, mail room assistant and data entry clerk. These positions were secured with such Virginia state departments as: Employment Commission (VEC), Department of Transportation (VDOT), Department of Taxation, Department of Treasury, and Department of Corrections. Participating institutions of higher education included: Norfolk State, and Old Dominion University (ODU). Most positions were full-time and all full time positions received an offer for the full employee benefit package. The salaries/wages ranged from \$8.00 an hour to \$28.00 per hour.

The majority (62%) of our referrals were provided from counselors and job coaches in the Richmond Metropolitan area. There were another (24%) from Tidewater, (9%) from Southwest and Southside, and (5%) from Northern Virginia.

Direct Hire -- In total 17 individuals secured employment through the direct hire process. The monthly placement report provided DRS and DVBI simple employment specific information and no personal data regarding the individual with the disability.

Individuals with disabilities secured employment in state agencies in a variety of diverse positions including: production support technician, office service specialist, postal clerk, food service assistant, instructor, kitchen assistant, exhibit assistant, groundskeeper and administrative assistant. State agency

departments where individuals secured employment included: Department of Transportation (VDOT), Virginia Employment Commission (VEC), Virginia Health Department, Central Virginia Training Center, Department of Corrections, Virginia Office of Professional Accreditation (VOPA), Virginia Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VDDHH), Department of Health Professional, Virginia Department of Housing Authority, Department of Vital Records, School for the Deaf and Blind and Department of Taxation. Institutions of higher education that hired project participants through direct hire included: University of Virginia (UVA), James Madison University (JMU), Virginia Tech, Norfolk State, Old Dominion University (ODU), and the community college system. Most positions were full-time and eligible for an employee benefit package. The salaries/wages ranged from \$7.50 to 36.00 per hour

Consumer Participation: State-Contracted Staffing Organizations -- Consumers were given an opportunity to decide if they wanted to be referred to one of the state approved staffing organizations for possible placement. Individuals were asked about their knowledge of the staffing industry and, if needed, they were educated on the industry and benefits of participation. Individuals were also involved in the referral process as well as registering with the staffing agencies.

Direct Hire -- No information was provided in monthly placement report from DRS and DVBI.

Barriers: State-Contracted Staffing Organizations -- The barriers faced by the project varied. First, was a lack of interest in working with a staffing company and taking a so-called “temporary job”. In many cases the consumer and/or the rehabilitation counselor reported that they were not interested in taking a temporary job even in the cases where the staffing specialist thought the assignment may turn into a long term or permanent job. Second, there were some agency personnel who did not understand the need for accommodation and would not allow a job coach on-site to assist with training. Third, some staff members within state agencies put up artificial barriers such as the work place is too small, the person would not fit in the environment, the job site is too dangerous for people with disabilities, the job has a lot of difficult tasks, and the job coach might get hurt as reasons to prevent a new hire. Finally, there were a host of process barriers which prevented the consumer from registering with the staffing organization once the rehabilitation counselor or job coach made the on-line referrals. In other cases the staffing companies were able to match the skill sets to available jobs but the applicants with a disability had to turn down the positions due to transportation barriers, change of mind regarding type of employment desired, or expressed interest in part time work vs. full time employment.

Feedback from the staffing agencies indicated that there is still a huge unmet need for educating hiring managers on recruiting, hiring, and accommodating workers with disabilities. As we find in the private sector there are many myths and fears which affect the interviewing and selection of job candidates with disabilities. These same myths and fears exist with the public sector which we identified in this project. The current hiring restrictions and downturn in the economy has increased the difficulty for agencies to recruit and hire new workers to include candidates with disabilities.

Direct Hire -- No information was provided in monthly placement report from DRS and DVBI.

Plan for Continuation: The staffing companies are excited about continuing to receive new referrals from agencies representing people with disabilities. The staffing specialists would like to see more people with disabilities come forward and register for employment with their organizations. We believe that the rehabilitation agencies and ESOs will continue to make referrals. As a result of the newly developed partnership between VCU-RRTC and DHRM a commitment has been established to stay actively involved with this effort after the grant ends with plans for upcoming joint personnel training programs for 2009.

At the end of the grant VCU took down the on-line referral system. However, paper copies of the referral form are still being used by the network. While VCU will not be in a position to collect data from the staffing organizations DRS and DVBI have agreed to provide VCU-RRTC with their placement report. These outcome data, relative to their placements in state agencies, will be shared with the VBPD.

Effective Strategies: We were able to overcome some of the barriers previously described by providing an intense program of training and technical assistance. The staffing specialists with Caliper, Abacus, and Maxium are willing to continue to promote this program with their state agency contacts. Vital to the success achieved through this project there is need for on-going education that must be addressed.

Objective 3: Develop collaboration of local partnerships throughout the state.

Accomplishments: In the first quarter of the grant, five regional training seminars for all partners, including DRS staff, ESOs, state agency human resource staff, and state-contracted staffing organizations, were planned and conducted. The purpose of the training seminars was to share general disability awareness information while providing necessary project specific information such as how to submit a referral and how to use the on-line system for tracking outcomes. The training seminars were held in Roanoke, Harrisonburg, Fairfax,

Norfolk, and Richmond. In total, 225 people attended these training events which set a strong foundation for the project.

Performance Measures: EM07 – People trained in employment
Target = 100; Actual = 225

The initial training events created a high level of interest for future events among participants. Together, with our partners at DHRM, DRS, and DBVI additional trainings were scheduled to address this immediate need. A second wave of interest was realized following the release of the Governor Kaine's Executive Directive #8 in October, 2007. VCU-RRTC obtained several additional requests for more training directed toward HR personnel in state government to ensure compliance with the directive and to instruct personnel on completing the required Annual Report to the Secretary of Administration. The following is a description of additional training events that the VCU-RRTC agreed to support that were above and beyond the requirements of the project.

- VCU-RRTC gave permission to DHRM to post the VCU Disability Awareness on-line training program to their intranet. This on-line training program will remain on the homepage of the DHRM website. DHRM has reported that as of December 31, 2008 they have a record of 415 employees completing the course.
- In June, 2007 VCU-RRTC staff partnered with DHRM, DRS, and DBVI to offer a new training program titled: "Disability Awareness and Interviewing Candidates with Disabilities". This training program was designed for DHRM human resource staff. During these training events we trained 38 staff representing 15 state agencies. An additional training was conducted for 8 Maxim staff members and a third session was conducted in Winchester during a VR network meeting, training an additional 25 individuals.
- During the October, 2007 DHRM Leadership Conference, RRTC facilitated a panel discussion titled: "Looking Beyond the Traditional Workforce – Recruiting and Hiring People with Disabilities." The panel consisted of Ed Turner, Senior Advisor on Disability Issues, representatives from the Department of Health's Division of Vital Records, Department of Professional Occupational Regulation (DPOR) who have successfully hired people with disabilities, and the Business Development Manager from DRS. Fifty-five (55) human resource employees from various state agencies were trained.
- A one day training event was delivered by VCU-RRTC staff in February, 2008. The title of the event was "Opening New Doors in State Government: Tools for Recruiting and Employing Workers with Disabilities" and

it was open to all state agency personnel. This event registered 30 people from 26 state agencies. An additional DRS training was also conducted on Executive Directive #8 with 55 rehabilitation staff and administrators attending.

- As a follow-up to the VCU webcast entitled: “Assistive Technology and Rehabilitation Engineering” a half day training event was designed and delivered in conjunction with DRS, DBVI, and DHRM in July 2008. This training was marketed as a technology fair which offered the 50 people who attended information and hands-on experiences with a variety of assistive technology devices.
- In December 2008 Erin Riehle, Executive Director of Project SEARCH, Division of Disability Services at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital, provided a training session for 28 individuals (24 state HR staff and 4 staffing agency staff) on “Getting Comfortable in Working with People with Developmental Disabilities”. Project SEARCH is a national program which serves people with disabilities through innovative workforce and career development.

Performance Measures: EM07 – People trained in employment.
Target = 0; Actual = 654

Demographics: VCU-RRTC staff held a joint meeting to review the grant activities and secure buy-in from the other collaborative organizations. The organizations involved were the Governor’s Senior Advisor on Disability Issues, the Secretary of Administration, DHRM, DRS, DBVI, The Choice Group, Career Support Services, Caliper Staffing, Abacus Staffing and several medical staffing organizations to include Maxim Staffing. The majority of the training was targeted to and was attended by state agency human resource personnel throughout the Commonwealth. Additionally, rehabilitation counselors, supervisors, job coaches, staffing organization specialists, and individuals with disabilities received training.

Consumer Participation: Ed Turner, a person with a disability and the Governor’s Senior Advisor on Disability Issues, was at several of the trainings. In the interview training sessions for state agency human resource personnel several individuals with disabilities, who were actively employed, participated as consultants and participants in the mock interview skits.

Barriers: There were no major barriers with this outcome. The main concern was if people in the training would return to their offices with enough information to share with their colleagues.

Plan for Continuation: Everything was accomplished for this outcome. We

have made paper copies of the referral form which had been made available to those who wish to continue making referrals to the staffing agencies. It appears that many of the individuals who were involved with the project will utilize their new relationships to coordinate additional referrals.

Effective Strategies: The most effective strategy in achieving this outcome was the involvement of all parties. The VCU staff made routine trips and phone calls to local rehabilitation offices, ESO offices, staffing agencies, and participated in on-going meetings with Department of Human Resource Management to answer questions, review referral information, provide additional training events and resolve issues of confidentially.

Objective 4: Develop and implement an educational program for all parties including individual with developmental and other disabilities, state agency heads and hiring managers, community rehabilitation programs and state-contracted staffing organizations

Accomplishments: This objective has received a lot of attention over the two years of this project. We feel a great deal of progress has been made with state agencies in their awareness and understanding of applicants and employees with disabilities. From September 2007 through December 2008, VCU-RRTC has completed 5 webcasts with a total of 990 people participating. In addition to the required webcast series a short video was developed and streamed on the web of Erin Riehle (Director, Project SEARCH) discussing techniques for improving employment of people with disabilities. This video was steamed on RRTC website and as of December, 2008 a record 91 individuals have viewed this presentation.

The following programs are included on a DVD submitted with this Final Report and are archived on the VCU-RRTC website at www.worksupport.com. These personnel training programs include:

1. **Job Coaching -- What is It and How Does It Affect Businesses and State Agencies?** --Presenters: Sherman Gifford (The Choice Group) and Stephanie White (Career Support Systems)
2. **Promoting Partnerships and Employment for People with Disabilities in State Government** -- Presenters: Patricia Waller (DHRM), Lynne Talley (VBPD), and Jennifer McDonough (RRTC)
3. **Assistive Technology and Rehabilitation Engineering** -- Presenter: Suzanne Simpson (DRS)
4. **Working Together for Successful Employment in Virginia: Connecting with Staffing Companies** -- Presenter: Jodi Shearer (Caliper)

5. **Partnership for Employment** -- Presenters: Governor Tim Kaine, James Rothrock (Commissioner, DRS) and Sara Wilson (Director, DHRM)
6. **Project Search** – Working with State Government for Employment Opportunities -- Presenter: Erin Riehle (Director, Project SEARCH)

Secretary of Administration, Viola Baskerville, sent out a memo asking every state agency to enroll at least one representative and to view several of the webcast productions such as one on Rehabilitation Engineering and Technology and Introducing the Partnership Program. The webcast, “Partnership for Employment” featured the Governor of Virginia discussing his commitment and asking that state agencies to recruit and hire more individuals with disabilities when they have qualified applicants. All of the webcasts were well received and successful. Our partners with the staffing organizations requested copies of the Job Coaching webcast so they could show portions of the program to prospective employer clients.

Performance Measures: EM07 – People trained in employment.
Target = 250 Actual = 1,081

Other Products: A fact sheet on Job Coaching was developed and disseminated to our partners. It was posted on the web page and we have received many requests for additional information and fact sheets. This fact sheet will be on our site as well as the Virginia Board’s site.

A desktop reference guide, “A Guide to Increasing the Successful Recruitment and Hiring of People with Disabilities: Tools and Resources for Directors, Managers and Staff,” was developed to assist agency heads, human resource managers and staff, and first line supervisors to better understand what they can do when an applicant with a disability applies, interviews or is hired by a state agency. This Guide brings together products and information that have been developed for this project and disseminated at project hosted training events.

While all of the information contained within the guide has already been disseminated through the multiple training events described within this report, the newly bound Guide has not yet been disseminated. Initial dissemination plan includes 50 copies to the Virginia Board, 10 copies to each staffing organization, 25 copies to DHRM, 20 copies to ESOs and 5 copies to DRS. In addition this product will be posted to the VCU-RRTC website for accessible downloading. VCU-RRTC will continue to report on dissemination to the Virginia Board.

A DVD entitled: “Promoting Partnerships and Employment for Virginians with Disabilities Webcasts 2008,” has been developed and will be disseminated to staffing companies and through the Department of Human Resource

Management. It will share information from the webcasts and training with Erin Riehle. This DVD will also be available on our website.

Demographics: Rehabilitation counselors, job coaches, staffing specialists, HR staff, and first line supervisors have participated in these training events.

Consumer Participation: Success stories were turned into 13 descriptive case studies of people with disabilities working in state government. These case studies are posted on the website and some are featured in the desktop reference guide.

Barriers: Things went smoothly with the coordination of these activities and it has been great to see the increased commitment to work with people with disabilities by the staffing companies and state agencies. The main barrier was trying to identify people with disabilities working in state government who were willing to share their stories. Many individuals reported that they were nervous about having their stories posted on the website and we completely understand their concerns.

Plan for Continuation: Despite the fact that the grant ended December 31, 2008 VCU-RRTC has committed to continue working on this effort with the DHRM and DRS. It is an important message which needs continued support and attention. DHRM has been wonderful with their efforts to hold training events, post on-line training opportunities for all state employees, and add a disability training module for new managers hired by state agencies.

Effective Strategies: Planning ahead was the major factor involved with these outcomes. It is critically important for a single person to assume responsibility of coordinating the times, locations, mailings, and marketing materials. This single point of contact should be involved with all training functions in order to ensure they get planned and implemented correctly.

Objective 5: Provide technical assistance for all partners, including individuals with developmental disabilities and other disabilities, Virginia Department of Human Resource Management, state agency heads and hiring managers, community rehabilitation programs and state-contracted staffing organizations.

Accomplishment: We provided on-going technical assistance to all of our partners over the two years. The VCU-RRTC staff developed an interactive website with multiple resources for people to use. VCU-RRTC staff will be glad to work with VBPD to assist with posting some or all of the resources on VBPD site or assisting with a link to the RRTC homepage. We have provided DHRM with an on-line disability awareness training program and will assist in the development of a training module on disability for their Learning Center.

Performance Measures: None targeted.

Demographics: Recipients of technical assistance mirrored those individuals who participated in our training events and included: rehabilitation counselors, job coaches, staffing specialists, HR staff, and first line supervisors.

Consumer Participation: Most individuals with disabilities made direct contact with either DRS, ESOs, and/or the staffing organizations. However, VCU-RRTC has record of four individuals with disabilities that contacted our office for support and referral. A follow up call was made by our office, following each consumer request, to assess satisfaction with the technical assistance and support.

Barriers: There were no barriers to this objective.

Plan for Continuation: We will be working with DHRM to assist with other training activities in the coming year! VCU-RRTC will offer its expertise on disability employment and job retention.

Effective Strategies: Vital to the success of this process was developing an open and honest communication with partnering organizations. In addition the VCU-RRTC interactive website development provided an additional resource to our partners.

c. Recommendations for Future Activities:

There are several items which the VCU-RRTC staff would like to offer as future activities. First, the Virginia Department of General Services (DGS) should ensure that all contractors doing business with the Commonwealth are organizations which are disability friendly and accessible. Second, while the two general staffing agencies approved by DGS (Caliper and ABACUS) were wonderful to work with, the medical staffing organizations did not achieve this high level of partnership. In general, we found the medical staffing companies were not responsive to our request for partnership and with the exception of Maxim did not accept referrals from people with disabilities. These companies reported that they did not feel people with disabilities could do the jobs being sourced. Several indicated that they had worked with rehabilitation programs in the community and people with disabilities but the experiences were not positive. Therefore, it is important for DGS to provide education to medical staffing organizations and technical assistance before signing additional contracts. Third, we continue to feel that there is a tremendous need for state agencies to acquire information on best practices and receive education regarding the benefits of recruiting, hiring, and promoting applicants and workers with disabilities. We recommend that the VBPD continue to provide grant assistance to raise the awareness of state government employees on disability and employment. Finally, we believe that it is important for VBPD to continue its relationship with the DHRM and DRS and focus on efforts to collaborate on the implementation of

Executive Directive # 8. It might be wise to offer a grant which could evaluate the effectiveness of this directive.

d. Assessment of Systemic Impact of Grant:

A number of systemic changes can be attributed to the successful completion of this grant. The following list highlights several items which we feel have occurred since the implementation of this grant.

- Increased awareness among staffing organizations approved by the State (Caliper & Abacus) on the benefits of working with job coaches and rehabilitation counselors.
- Increased awareness among community rehabilitation providers and local rehabilitation agencies on the benefits of referring individuals with disabilities to a staffing company sourcing state employment.
- Increased opportunities for people with disabilities to receive state employment through a staffing company or direct hire by state agencies.
- Improved knowledge and awareness from staff within state agencies on interviewing and accommodating workers with disabilities.
- Increased commitment by DHRM on revising their training curriculum for newly hired and promoted managers.
- Improved resources to State agencies and a directive from the Governor to explore ways to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities.
- Enhanced mechanism to report progress on recruiting, hiring, and accommodating workers with disabilities.
- Increased number of advocates within staffing organizations to recommend technology and awareness with state agency contacts.
- Improved resources such as the newly published Desktop Guide, webcast productions, and successful case studies to share with agencies and workers.
- Improved training programs available to state employees on interacting and working with people with disabilities.

