

# Certificate Program in Psychiatric Vocational Rehabilitation

In an effort to help rehabilitation counselors in state vocational rehabilitation systems improve their skills to build and sustain partnerships with persons who experience psychiatric disabilities, the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation at Boston University has developed the Certificate Program in Psychiatric Vocational Rehabilitation. The certificate program offers a skills-based training approach to providing psychiatric vocational rehabilitation services.

Using training materials that include the choose-get-keep approach and other psychiatric rehabilitation technologies developed by the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, the certificate program provides the opportunity for personnel already providing employment support to people with disabilities to maintain or enhance their skills, knowledge, and expertise without obtaining a master's degree.

Improving practitioners' ability to provide vocational assessment, vocational goal setting/planning, job placement, and follow-along support not only assists the individual's potential for employment, but also increases the specialized practitioner's job potential, as well as the capacity of the programs that serve consumers with psychiatric disabilities. Specifically, the certificate program focuses on enhancing the practitioners' skills in assessing rehabilitation readiness, performing functional assessments, developing partnerships, and creating reasonable accommodations in the workplace.

## Background

The Certificate Program in Psychiatric Vocational Rehabilitation derived from the need to enhance employment opportunities for persons with psychiatric disabilities, regardless of the severity of an individual's disability. Stemming from the 1992 Rehabilitation Act Amendments—which stated that regardless of the severity of an individual's disability, his or her employment status would benefit from vocational rehabilitation—this legislation mandated that if appropriate services and supports are made available, individuals with more severe disabilities can work, i.e., prepare for, enter, engage in, and retain employment, commensurate with their values and capabilities (Abbott, 1993).

Emphasizing that service provision and eventual employment should take place in integrated settings to the maximum extent possible, the 1992 Amendments were specifically designed to facilitate access to vocational rehabilitation services, as well as the informed participation by the individual with a disability in all aspects of rehabilitation process.

Following the enactment of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992, the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) recognized that rehabilitation professionals need to be knowledgeable about severe mental illness, about rehabilitation principles, and how mental illness and the vocational rehabilitation process interact.” (Rehabilitation Services Administration, 1995). In response to these emerging needs, this one-year Certificate Program in Psychiatric Vocational Rehabilitation was proposed and made possible with a five-year grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

## Program Description

The one-year certificate program consists of six two-day institutes and focuses on the following:

***Partnering Competencies:*** *Partnering* involves the skills a practitioner needs to fully engage the service recipient in the vocational rehabilitation process. The skills of connecting, coaching, and collaborating are presented throughout all six institutes.

***Identifying Vocational Needs:*** *Identifying vocational needs* entails listing generic and personalized outcomes for the psychiatric vocational rehabilitation process. Participants learn how to explain services, introduce roles, explore initial hopes and interests, and verify personal information.

***Facilitating Vocational Rehabilitation Readiness:*** *Facilitating readiness* is determining strategies for helping a service recipient engage in and sustain involvement in vocational rehabilitation activities. Assessing readiness, selecting service direction, and developing readiness are the main activities of facilitating vocational rehabilitation readiness.

***Personalizing Vocational Assessment:*** *Personalizing vocational assessment* involves designing an individual diagnostic process for facilitating goal achievement. Participants are taught how to assist a recipient in choosing a preliminary goal, conducting a vocational assessment, and validating the goal.

***Achieving Vocational Placements:*** *Achieving vocational placements* is helping people who have psychiatric disabilities to secure admission to and acceptance by preferred work environments. Participants are taught how to develop a search plan, locate “best fit” placements, market client strengths, and negotiate placement terms.

***Developing Essential Skills, Supports, and Accommodations:*** Arranging ways of improving assets needed to get and/or keep a placement is essential in psychiatric vocational rehabilitation. The competencies required for developing essential skills and supports include: enhancing performance, accessing resources, and arranging for accommodations.

***Meeting the Needs of Culturally Diverse Service Recipients:*** *Meeting the needs of culturally diverse service recipients* involves adapting the vocational rehabilitation process to deliver effective interventions to service recipients from a variety of backgrounds. Participants have the opportunity to learn how to generate hypotheses, place the person in context, and understand specific cultures.

During these sessions, instructors give particular emphasis to building and sustaining the relationships between the practitioner and the person seeking assistance. Additionally, the certificate program focuses on identifying and implementing reasonable accommodations, and learning the implications of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 for consumers, practitioners, and potential employers.

## Graduate Profile: Bill Howard

Bill Howard is one of fourteen professionals who participated in the first class of the Certificate Program in Psychiatric Vocational Rehabilitation. Bill is a veteran in the vocational rehabilitation system, possessing over twenty years of field experience. Currently, Bill works for the New Hampshire Department of Education, Division of Adult Learning and Rehabilitation, and is using his experience in the certificate program to enhance his skills and knowledge as a rehabilitation counselor. In particular, Bill is finding that the skills involved with identifying personal criteria, serving the needs of culturally diverse service recipients, and developing job accommodations are helping consumers to be able to rate their personal values and interests and be aware of which environments are comfortable for them.

Using these skills has also increased the enthusiasm of consumers, giving them hope to move beyond less skilled employment options. Bill has enjoyed the certificate program and emphasizes that “this training has made me take a look at how I do my job; it has

opened my eyes to a better way to help those we serve." For both Bill Howard and the consumers of New Hampshire's vocational rehabilitation services, learning and using these skills assures that the consumers' interests take precedence over criteria that others may deem as more important. Bill expects his newfound proficiency will help foster hope for consumers to strive toward heights previously viewed as unattainable.

## Graduate Profile: Gisela Sardinias

As a dedicated helping professional, Gisela Sardinias is committed to developing her education and skills in the changing field of psychiatric rehabilitation. Gisela's search for training led her to the Certificate Program in Psychiatric Vocational Rehabilitation offered through the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation. She was attracted primarily to the program to improve her counseling skills. At the conclusion of the program, Gisela described changes in her counseling capabilities that have enhanced her ability to work with consumers. I am more able to pick up on the underlying issues and feelings that the consumer is trying to express. I am also more sensitive to observing body language and the way in which an individual is answering a question. I take time with each person to make sure that what I hear is what he or she is trying to communicate."

Gisela's participation in the certificate program has also created change at the North State Behavioral System where she is employed. Staff at North State Behavioral System have implemented training in cultural competency, organized rehabilitation-focused groups, and reconstructed the client assessment process. In addition, information provided through the certificate program has been useful to increase communication and collaboration between the community support department and the clinical services department, thereby involving staff from both departments in the rehabilitation process. As a result of the certificate program, Gisela reports: "We're more sensitive to differences among consumers both culturally and individually and we are in a better position to address those differences. We are more consumer-centered."

## References

Abbot, J. (1993). Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992: Implications for people with psychiatric disabilities. *Community Support Network News*, 9(3).

Rehabilitation Services Administration. (1995). *The provision of vocational rehabilitation services to individuals who have severe mental illness: Program administrative review*. Washington, DC: Author.

## About this issue

The Certificate Program in Psychiatric Vocational Rehabilitation was the vision of our late colleague and friend, Dr. Karen Danley. Karen was the first director for the Career Achievement Services at the Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation and later served as the center's director of development. She developed and implemented the "choose-get-keep" approach to supported employment, and her life's work was dedicated to developing and improving vocational rehabilitation services for people with psychiatric disabilities. The Certificate Program in Psychiatric Vocational Rehabilitation is dedicated to the memory of Karen's life and work.