

HORIZONS

SOUTH CAROLINA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION DEPARTMENT

YES program targets potential dropouts

SCVRD is targeting potential high school dropouts in an effort to steer them toward successful work experiences, thanks to a Rehabilitation Services Administration grant through the U.S. Department of Education.

"We're aiming at kids with disabilities who are at high risk for dropping out," said Kerry Mandeville, who is overseeing the grant.

Statistics indicate only 24 percent of students with disabilities graduate from high school with a diploma.

The two-to-five year Youth Employment Services (YES) grant will fund two VR staff members who are transition assessment specialists. One will be at Strom Thurmond High School Career Center in Johnston and the other at Lancaster High School Career Center in Lancaster.

The transition assessment specialists should be in place by late February or early March, Mandeville said.

The two high schools were chosen because they meet certain demographic criteria and they are near an urban center that offers employment opportunities, he said.

There are three approaches:

- Apply the High School/High Tech model with Guideposts for Success to encourage the youngsters to go on to post-secondary training. The High School/High Tech program provides young people with disabilities with opportunities to explore jobs or post-secondary education leading to technology-related careers. Guideposts for Success is a program intended to support youths with disabilities through the transition to adulthood.
- Offer training for a high-level technical occupation as the Skilled Workforce Apprentice Training (SWAT) program expands.

- Students who are in special education classes will participate in modified Guideposts for Success activities, educating them about employer expectations and employment demands.

"All of them will get a meaningful experience with work," said Anne Iriel, a program development coordinator who is working with the School-to-Work Transition program. "It will enhance their chances of staying in school and going to work."

The transition assessment specialists will work closely with the school staff and act as counselor, career planning and employment specialist and employment coach.

The students will participate in individual and group activities that will include field trips to potential employers and higher education sites; learning job-seeking skills; and getting meaningful work experiences as they learn about employer expectations.

"The significant thing is that they will have an actual work experience opportunity," Mandeville said. The grant includes money for training and stipends for transportation.

The Education and Economic Development Act (EEDA) mandates that schools track outcomes for all students.

"Both schools have been incredibly receptive to the program," Iriel said. "We will provide services for youngsters with disabilities and follow-up after they leave school."

Plans are to expand to the Beaufort-Walterboro area next year and, if the grant is extended to five years, to the Laurens-Greenwood area in the third year.

"We want to serve them early and serve them well," Mandeville said.



Employment is program goal.

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Enabling eligible South Carolinians with Disabilities to prepare for, achieve and maintain competitive employment

Model Home also serving as telework training site

SCVRD staff members now have another tool they can use to train clients with significant disabilities for competitive employment.

The barrier-free model home, which is part of the agency's Center for Comprehensive Programs located on the West Columbia campus, has been remodeled for use as a telework training site for people with significant disabilities who need to work at home, said Barbara Hollis, assistant commissioner for Planning and Program Development.

"Participants will receive individualized training for a specific job, specialized accommodations based on their needs and education and counseling related to working at home," Hollis said.

"The first initiative involves a cutting-edge approach for an established company," she said. The company has trained SCVRD staff who in turn will train the clients for a specific job. The company will hire clients who successfully complete the training.

Many employers do not have the in-house resources to assess the needs of an individual with a significant disability or provide individualized training, monitoring and follow-up.

"We hope this program

will fill that gap and help train qualified workers for home-based employment," Hollis said.

She said initially it will be a day program for clients in the West Columbia area, but plans are to expand it statewide and offer accommodations either in the model home or at the nearby Evaluation Center on campus.

Meanwhile, the old system that automated many functions of the model home has been replaced with remote controls that can be purchased on the open market, said Tom Jackman, Rehabilitation Technology manager. He said the new system was purchased for a total of less than \$300.

"If one part breaks, we can replace it," he said. "It's a smart way to go and it's doable."

Jackman said the model home will retain its primary function as a model of what can be done to accommodate people with disabilities in a residential setting.

Improvements include a new ramp off the kitchen, new paint, wallpaper, blinds, furniture and fixtures; remote control lighting and music throughout the house; a remote door opener; a work station where the height can be adjusted automatically or manually; and an automated callout system.



SCVRD's model home renovated for home-based employment training.

Renovated MDC open for business

The Muscular Development Center was slated to reopen in early March after being closed for a year for renovations.

A component of the Center for Comprehensive Programs located on SCVRD's main campus in West Columbia, the MDC facilities have been missed by clients and employees. While clients have been able to use some of the exercise and physical therapy equipment at the Evaluation Center during the interim, employees have not been able to take advantage of it and no one has been able to use the pool.

But the wait will be worth it, said Anne Iriel, program development coordinator who is assisting in oversight of the MDC renovations.

The pool has been completely resurfaced and has new filtration and dehumidification systems and a new deck.

The biggest change, though, will be the switch from fresh to salt



Workers replace glass on the front of the Muscular Development Center

water.

"Salt water is safer because you're not handling chemicals and it's less corrosive," Iriel said. "We were using chlorine that was two-and-a-half times as strong as household bleach."

The pool has a purification system that uses salt to make

chlorine through an electrolytic cell device. So instead of adding chlorine on a regular basis, salt is added periodically.

The water is about 10 percent as salty as the ocean.

Plus, "it's gentler on equipment, eyes and bathing suits," Iriel said.

Elsewhere in the building, the bathrooms have

been totally redone; the weight room and physical therapy room have rubberized sports flooring; and there is new paint and acoustic carpeting on the walls.

One office has been converted into a changing area for clients who need more space and there are additional storage areas.

In the weight room, the arm bicycles, treadmills and Aerodyne bicycles will be back and elliptical trainers (a combination treadmill/stairclimber) and recumbent bicycles (non-weight-bearing machines) will be added.

New equipment in the physical therapy area will include a NuStep recumbent cross trainer for people with limited lower body strength. It provides an upper body workout and improves range of motion in the lower body.

The building will feature all new glass, a new air lock on the front door and a new security entrance system.



Unloading the wheelchair-accessible weight machine.

Safety will be watchword at SCVRD

A new, full-fledged security system soon will be a reality throughout the SCVRD system, according to Neil Lown, Safety and Risk Management specialist.

"The State Office and the Lexington area office and training center will be the first of the nine facilities renovated," Lown said, and eventually "the system will be installed statewide in all VR centers."

The renovations reflect heightened national and state awareness of security issues. Lown said when the SCVRD buildings were built, the goal was accessibility, so there were plenty of doors.

"Now, security demands a single entry," he said. "We don't want to learn the hard way."

Security improvements include:

- New identification cards with sensors. The sensors will be scanned by proximity readers

which will govern where the employee has access. If s/he needs to go to an area where they do not have access, they can sign in like a visitor.

- Each employee will have a PIN number so if the card is lost, it can't be used by anyone else. Keypads will be installed.
- Security cameras in appropriate areas.

In the State Office, for instance, the building will be partitioned and the back door will be the single point of entry for anyone without a card and a PIN number. Visitors will have to sign in with the receptionist at the desk and staff members will have to come escort them.

Keypads will be on the other three doors, which will require a PIN to open. Keypads also will be at the elevator, the stairwell near



Area office reception desks will be glassed in.

the Evaluation Center, and the Human Resources office because it is difficult to isolate, Lown said.

In addition, every computer will have "hot" keys, which can be used to summon help if necessary. They will indicate whether immediate assistance is required or if the problem is less urgent. A screen showing the problem will pop up on each computer and anybody who sees it can respond, Lown said.

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