

Town of West Hartford

Advisory Commission for Persons with Disabilities

Meeting MINUTES

Monday, June 24, 7:00 PM

Elmwood Community Center Auditorium

1) Meeting was called to order at 7:03 PM

2) Introductions

a) Members present: Christy Miller, Tara McNeil, Kimberly Jacobsen, Jennifer Searls, Elisa Neira, Amy Messinger, Jason Mirsky

b) Members absent: Erin Conneely, Brittany Koziara

c) Guests present: Mary Silverberg and Joe Kolczynski

3) Minutes from May 13, 2024 were approved

4) CERT Team Report - Christy Miller

a) Memorial Day Parade, Juneteenth and Celebrate updates from CERT.

b) Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security will be having a series of webinars specifically designed for CERT team members and CERT leader Bob McCue said it was fine for our Advisory Commission to partake if you are interested - details attached.

5) Vision Zero Task Force - no update given.

6) New Business - none.

7) Guest Speaker – Jennifer Jenkins, lead advocate from Disability Rights Connecticut – presentation attached.

8) Adjournment at 7:43- next meeting date: Monday, September 9, 2024, at the Elmwood Community Center Auditorium at 7:00 PM. Speaker will be: Darlene Borree. Darlene will talk about Profound Autism and life experiences.

Dear CERT Members,

We are excited to announce the launch of our Connecticut CERT Connect: Webinar Series, aimed at empowering you with vital skills and knowledge to effectively respond to emergencies within your community. Whether you're new to disaster preparedness or looking to enhance your existing skills, these webinars will provide invaluable training tailored to our local needs.

Webinar Series Overview:

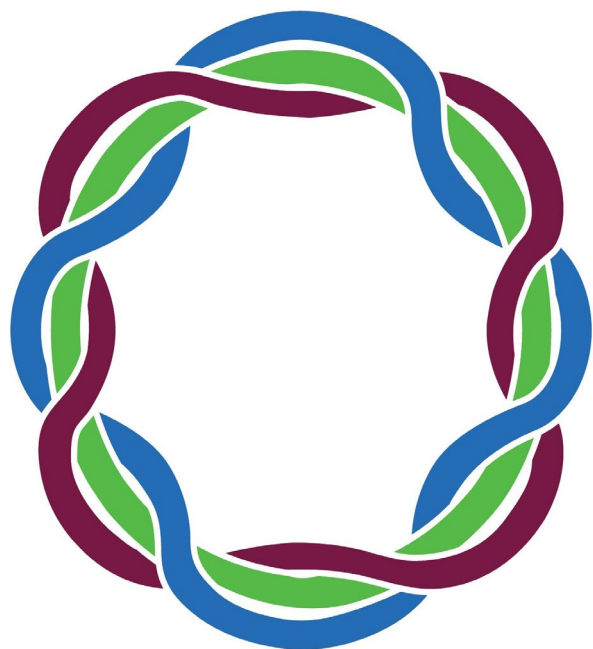
1. Tuesday, June 25, 2024 – 7pm - 9pm – **Hurricane Season Preparedness** – This session will provide an updated forecast of the current hurricane season and how CERT members can prepare for a hurricane. Various CERT roles before and following a hurricane will be discussed.
 2. Tuesday, August 6, 2024 – 7pm - 9pm – **Amateur (Ham) Radio** – This session will provide an overview of ham radio operations, capabilities and how it can be utilized in emergency management and CERT.
 3. Tuesday, October 22, 2024 – 7pm - 9pm – **Targeted Violence Awareness & Presentation** – This session will provide tools to recognize concerning behaviors and prevent targeted violence.
 4. Tuesday, December 17, 2024 – 7pm - 9pm – **Autism Awareness for First Responders** – This session will offer insights and tools for interacting with individuals on the Autism Spectrum.
1. **Platform:** Webinars will be hosted via Zoom
 2. **Registration:** <https://www.train.org/connecticut/course/1120854/compilation>
 3. **See attached flyer for more information and job aid for registration guidance.**

We encourage everyone within the CERT community to participate and spread the word. Together, we can strengthen our readiness and resilience in the face of any challenge.

Josh Cingranelli

Emergency Management Area Coordinator, Region 3

Connecticut Department of Emergency Services & Public Protection



DISABILITY RIGHTS CONNECTICUT

Vocational Rehabilitation in Connecticut

2024



- **Legal advocacy organization**
- **Dedicated to identifying and eliminating barriers** faced by people with disabilities when exercising their civil, legal, and human rights.
- **Independent, nonprofit organization**
- **Largely funded by federal entities** and authorized by the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act, the Protection & Advocacy for Individuals with Mental Illness Act, the Protection and Advocacy for Individual Rights Act, and the other protection and advocacy system acts, and their respective implementing regulations.

ABOUT DRCT

AS CONNECTICUT'S
PROTECTION AND
ADVOCACY SYSTEM (P&A),
WE WORK TO IMPROVE
THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR
INDIVIDUALS WITH
DISABILITIES, THEIR
FAMILIES, AND OUR
COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE



WHO WE HELP

- DRCT advocates for Connecticut residents with **all types** of disabilities and of **all ages** within the mandates and requirements established by federal statutes.



WHAT WE DO

- **Systemic Advocacy**
 - DRCT focuses its limited resources on systemic issues affecting large numbers of people with disabilities.
- **Information and Referral (I&R)**
 - We provide information, resources, or self-advocacy assistance with issues that meet our established priorities.
- **Monitoring & Investigating Facilities**
 - DRCT has the authority to monitor locations where people with disabilities go to school, work, or live and to investigate reports of abuse and neglect or where it has probable cause to believe that persons with disabilities have been abused or neglected.
 - We do not duplicate the services of other state mandated protective services but may conduct a secondary investigation if warranted.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- WHAT IS VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR)?
- HOW CAN VR HELP PEOPLE WITH THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES?
- HOW CAN THE CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CAP) HELP?





WHY WORK?

- Increase monthly income
- Increase self-esteem and self-worth
- Socialization
- Increase independence



BARRIERS TO WORK FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- Fear of what will happen to state and federal benefits.
- Understanding how and deciding when to disclose a disability.
- Trouble getting employment-related services or support to prepare for a job.
- Prior discrimination in the workplace.
- Need help understanding the right to accommodations from an employer.





LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION 2023

WITHOUT A DISABILITY

- 65.8% were employed
- 16% employed only part-time
- 3.5% unemployment rate

WITH A DISABILITY

- 22.5% were employed
- 29% employed only part-time
- 7.2% unemployment rate
 - Black – 10.2 %
 - Hispanic – 9.2 %
 - Asian – 7.0 %
 - White – 6.7 %



Source: (<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/disabl.pdf>)

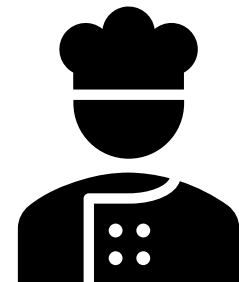
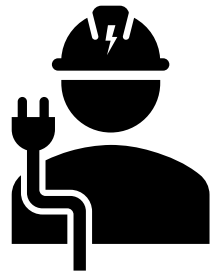
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

IN CONNECTICUT



WHAT IS VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION?

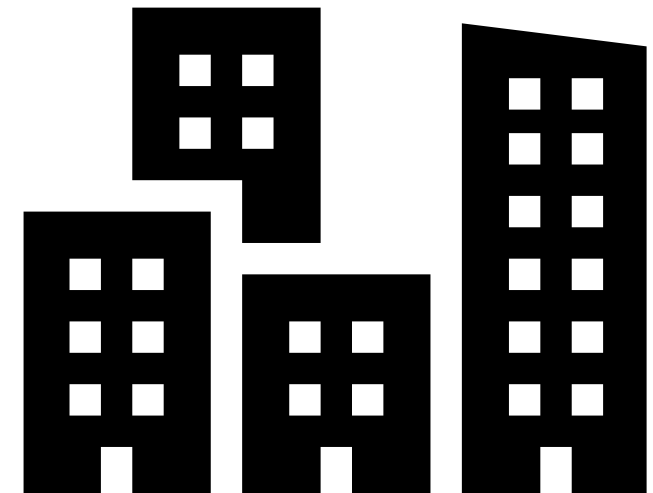
- Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) provides services to help individuals with disabilities prepare for, find, advance in and keep employment.
- The state vocational rehabilitation (VR) services program is authorized by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehab Act), as amended by Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).





WHY IS VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION IMPORTANT?

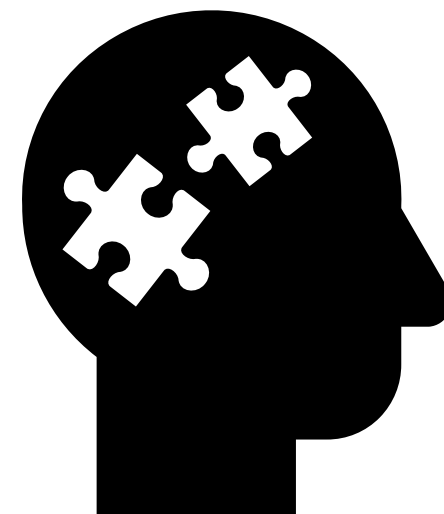
- The purpose of the VR program is to maximize employment, economic self-sufficiency, independence, inclusion and integration into society for individuals with disabilities.





WHY IS VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION IMPORTANT?

- Meaningful employment – real jobs that are integrated and pay real wages - is fundamental to quality of life, well-being, and access to the same opportunities as others to exercise our freedoms and choices as citizens.



COMPETITIVE INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT (CIE)

Full-time or part-time work that is:

- **Competitive**

- At least minimum wage
- Pays at least as much as someone without a disability doing the same job.
- Offers the same type of benefits



- **Integrated**

- At a location with other employees who do not have disabilities.
- Provides interaction with those employees



- **Career oriented**

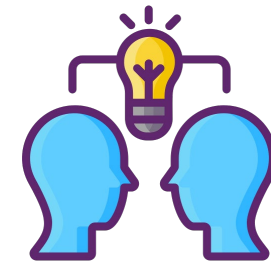
- As appropriate, offers opportunity for advancement



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SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT

- Competitive, integrated employment (including customized employment)
- that offers support services (like a job coach)
- beyond a reasonable transition period (longer than a trial work period, possibly permanently)
- Because of the nature and severity of an individual's disability (because someone needs those interventions to be successful).





CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT

“a flexible process designed to personalize the employment relationship between a job seeker and an employer in a way that meets the needs of both.”

U.S. Office of Disability Employment Policy (OSEP)





CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT

Discovery

Job
Development

Systematic
Instruction



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VR IN CONNECTICUT



- Aging and Disability Services (ADS)
 - Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS)
 - Serves adults and transition-aged students with all types of disabilities (except those who are legally blind),
 - 800-537-2549
 - Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)
 - Coordinates and provides services to all CT residents who are legally blind or have low vision.
 - 860-602-4000

HOW DO I GET VR SERVICES?

Contact the BRS or
BESB office closest
to you to make an
appointment.

You must fill out an
application and be
determined eligible
for VR services.

VR has 60 days to
decide if you are
eligible for services.



ELIGIBILITY DETERMINATION

VR will consider:

- Current Medical Records.
- Education Records.
- Information from the applicant and his or her family.
- Determination made by other government agencies.
- VR counselor observations.
- If existing information is not available, out-dated, or insufficient, additional assessments may be made through the provision of VR services.

TO BE ELIGIBLE
FOR VR SERVICES
AN INDIVIDUAL
HAS:

a **Physical or Mental Impairment** which is a;

Substantial Impediment to employment and;

Needs Vocational Rehabilitation services to “prepare for, secure, retain, advance in or regain employment;” and

Can **Benefit** from Vocational Rehabilitation services (this is presumed).

SPECIAL RULE FOR
SOCIAL SECURITY
DISABILITY INSURANCE
(SSDI) AND
SUPPLEMENTAL
SECURITY INCOME (SSI)
BENEFICIARIES.

SSDI and SSI Recipients are ...

Presumed to have a physical or mental impairment
which is a substantial impediment to employment
and...

Presumed to need vocational rehabilitation services
to prepare for, secure, retain, advance in or regain
employment.



WHAT KIND OF SERVICES CAN VR PROVIDE?

Medical and
Psychological
Assessment

Vocational
Evaluation and
Planning

Career
Counseling and
Guidance

Work Experience
While in High
School

Training and
Education After
High School

Job-Site
Assessment and
Accommodations

Job Placement

Job Coaching

On-the-Job
Training

Supported
Employment

Assistive
Technology and
Devices

Time-Limited
Medical and/or
Psychological
Treatment





CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (CAP)

PROTECTION & ADVOCACY FOR BENEFICIARIES
OF SOCIAL SECURITY (PABSS)





WHAT IS THE CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM?

CAP

- The Client Assistance Program, or CAP, at Disability Rights Connecticut, helps applicants and consumers of Connecticut's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies.
- CAP can help individuals with disabilities who are working with:
 1. the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) or
 2. the VR program at the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB).
- CAP can help you understand your rights and responsibilities in applying for and receiving vocational rehabilitation services.



WHAT IS PROTECTION & ADVOCACY FOR BENEFICIARIES OF SOCIAL SECURITY?

PABSS

- The Protection & Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) program at Disability Rights Connecticut, helps Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and Social Security Income (SSI) beneficiaries eliminate barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment.
- PABSS staff can provide self-advocacy advice or direct assistance to SSI/SSDI beneficiaries in
 - making informed choices regarding employment services,
 - in understanding and asserting employment rights, and negotiating the rehabilitation services system.



CAP OR PABSS MAY BE ABLE TO HELP IF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR) HAS:

- Denied your request for services,
- Offered you fewer services than you need,
- Found you ineligible and you disagree,
- Stopped communicating with you,
- Offered you an employment goal that is not in line with your skills, interests and abilities, or
- Closed your case before your goal was met.





PABSS MAY BE ABLE TO HELP WITH OTHER ISSUES:

- Ticket to Work and using work incentives
- Maintaining Medicaid benefits while working
- Employment provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- Any obstacles to obtaining or maintaining employment such as:
 - transportation barriers, accessing assistive technology devices and services.
 - Discrimination in based on race, age, marital status, gender identity, sexual orientation, etc.





- A 17-year-old junior in high school was getting Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) through his school program.
- He wanted to start looking for a real job, so he scheduled an intake appointment at his local BRS Office.
- When he arrived for the intake appointment, the BRS counselor offered to continue Pre-ETS and would not complete the application for BRS's full array of services. The client and his mother felt that they had been “talked out of” applying for services.
- The CAP advocate communicated with the BRS counselor through email and attended meetings with the client to secure an intake appointment. The client was granted an application and found eligible for services.

CASE EXAMPLE #1



- An individual with a Traumatic Brain Injury had been working with BRS for a few months when she asked to change her employment goal and train for a new career.
- Her counselor and the employment specialist did a market analysis and decided that it would not be a good return on investment for BRS. They denied her request.
- She asked for a new counselor and contacted CAP.
- The CAP advocate attended meetings with the client to advocate for a change of employment goal and development of an appropriate Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).
- The CAP advocate and the client provided supporting documentation and BRS agreed to do a second market analysis.
- BRS agreed to change her employment goal and provide the training she needed.

CASE EXAMPLE #2



- A 36-year-old SSDI recipient called when they decided to look for a job and were afraid of losing their benefits.
- They feared discrimination while applying and interviewing for a job.
- DRCT referred the client to a benefits counselor who could explain the impacts of employment on their SS and medical benefits.
- DRCT also provided information about the client's rights under the ADA and where to file discrimination complaints if needed.
- After meeting with the benefits counselor, the client started working part-time while still receiving some of their benefits.

CASE EXAMPLE #3



- A 19-year-old recipient of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) contacted DRCT regarding the denial of her request for full funding of a college training program from BRS.
- BRS was requiring the client's participation in the cost of her post-secondary education.
- The VR regulations prohibit the designated state unit from requiring the participation of SSI/SSDI recipients in the cost of receiving vocational rehabilitation services.
- The DRCT advocate wrote a letter on her behalf requesting a reversal of BRS's decision.
- BRS agreed to recalculate the client's financial contribution and review it at a virtual meeting.
- When the form still contained a student loan and merit scholarship contribution, the DRCT advocate wrote directly to the bureau director to request an exception to their current policy.
- The BRS Director granted an exemption to their policy
- They also indicated that the agency's policies regarding financial contribution is under review and will be revised to maintain regulatory compliance.

CASE EXAMPLE #4

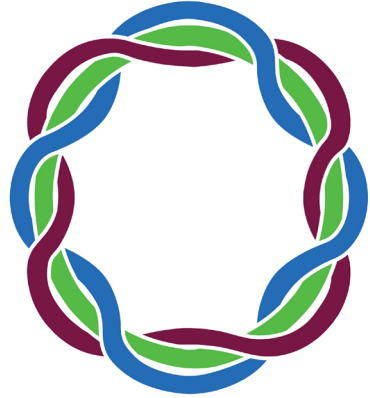
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU ASK FOR HELP?

- The CAP/PABSS advocate may explain how BRS and BESB work and what these agencies can and can't do for you. They might offer you some self-advocacy advice and ask you to try to solve the problem on your own first.
- If that doesn't work, the CAP/PABSS team will review the information and decide if they can offer to help you at that time. Every case is different. The CAP/PABSS advocate will work with you to find the best way to solve the problem.





ANY ASSISTANCE THAT DRCT
PROVIDES IS AT NO COST TO
THE CLIENT.



**DISABILITY RIGHTS
CONNECTICUT**
Justice. Community. Inclusion.

Jennifer Jenkins
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(860) 310-1633 (direct)
Jennifer.Jenkins@DisRightsCT.org

WE'RE HERE TO HELP!

CONTACT US AT:

860-422-4220 (VOICE)

860-509-4992 (VIDEOPHONE)

800-842-7303 (TOLL-FREE IN CT)

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