



# VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION IN THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

### A Quick Reference Guide

This guide answers basic questions regarding the rights of people with disabilities to equal access to public services and accommodations. More complex questions should be answered by an advocate or attorney at DRCVI (formerly known as Virgin Islands Advocacy, Inc.)

### WHAT PROGRAMS EXIST TO HELP PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES GET EMPLOYED?

States and territories in the United States receive grants from the U.S. Government to provide vocational rehabilitation services. The vocational rehabilitation program is designed to help you enter the work force or return to work. The program is designed to assess, plan, develop and provide Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services to eligible individuals with disabilities, consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, and interests.

To prepare individuals with disabilities to enter or re-enter the workforce, VR offers financial and other kinds of assistance, including job training. One of the goals of VR is to enable persons with disabilities to develop and apply their skills at the highest level possible.

VR services provide a wide range of activities and programs to help one prepare to enter the workforce. It may include grants for college education, a computer, a truck that is necessary for your job, etc. In short, it can help with providing all the various tools you may need to succeed.

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## WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES?

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There are a few general requirements that you must satisfy to obtain VR services. If you have received or are receiving special education, you are automatically qualified. Otherwise, you must comply with certain conditions.

First, you need to qualify as a person with a disability, that may include physical, mental or emotional impairments. Your disability must be a substantial barrier to employment opportunities. There must also be a reason to believe that you can



benefit from VR services.

Finally, you must be able to get and keep a job.

Even if you are not certain whether you are eligible, it is

always better to apply for the services. And even if you are turned down or denied VR services, do not give up hope. If you are absolutely convinced that you are eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation services, that your disability is definitely limiting your ability to work, and your request for services has been denied, there is an appeals process that you can follow.

DRCVI may be able to assist you.

## HOW CAN VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION HELP ME?

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According to the Department of Education, VR services may include aptitude testing, occupational exploration, locating the right type of training program, exploring educational facilities, vocational guidance, counseling and referral services, interpreter services, reader services, services for students with disabilities for transition from school to

work, personal assistance services and job placement.

And this is probably only the short list! Simply put, VR assists you by helping you make transitions in your life, either from school to work or, after the onset of a disability, returning to work. The only requirement is that you satisfy the eligibility

test, and you can only do that by applying for VR services.

## CAN VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION HELP ME START A BUSINESS?

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In the past, individuals with disabilities were not encouraged start a business, either because of discrimination or because technology did not exist to accommodate their needs. This is no longer the case. There have been significant advances in so many fields that persons with

disabilities should not be discouraged from seeking to start their own business.

There are many ways to reach your goal. For example, one gentleman in the Virgin Islands started his own taxicab company on St. Thomas. He focuses on providing regular taxi services,

including taxis specifically for persons with disabilities.

There are many other options you may be able to explore and use. If you can create a satisfactory plan, it would be worthwhile to speak with VR about what type of assistance they could provide for you.

## ARE PROGRAMS AVAILABLE TO HELP ME OBTAIN ASSISTIVE DEVICES?

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The Virgin Islands Government through its Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, is designed to provide many services to persons with disabilities, including special devices to help you. Additional programs specifically focus on making such devices available to as many eligible persons as possible. DRCVI can provide legal or referral assistance about this program.

VR may provide instruments or tools that enable persons with

disabilities to perform better on the job. These “assistive” devices” are designed to help you to function as independently as possible.

For example, someone with a hearing deficiency, may not be able to function as well as someone who has normal hearing. However, with the use of an assistive device as simple as a amplifier, a person with a hearing deficiency would be better able to hear and therefore to

function.

With the use of an adaptive steering device, wheelchair lift, or other adaptive driving equipment, persons with disabilities are often able to drive vehicles as well as those without such disabilities.

Contact the office of Vocational Rehabilitation. They may be able to help you. The telephone numbers are: St. Thomas/St. John/Water Island 774-0930, St. Croix 773-2323.

## I AM A SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENT. CAN I RECEIVE VR SERVICE?

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Yes! The Virgin Islands Government must provide VR assistance to students with disabilities in public schools. These services can help a student make the transition from school to college or into the workforce.

For instance, VR is supposed to attend individual education program (IEP) meetings with the student who is 15 years old or older. IEP meetings are sessions in which teachers involved in the student’s education help formulate that student’s school

program.

Unfortunately, VR does not routinely attend these meetings. This has to change because of the great importance that VR can play in a student’s future.

If there are ever problems in this regard, please contact DRCVI for assistance. You have the right to file a complaint directly on your own behalf with the Division of Special Education in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Find us at <http://drcvi.org>

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The Quick Reference Guides are made available to you through the Disability Rights Center of the Virgin Islands. The protection and advocacy system was created by the U.S. Congress in 1975 to provide people with disabilities access to legal services as a means of guaranteeing their inalienable rights of citizenship and promoting opportunities for independence, productivity, integration and inclusion into the community. DRCVI has been the designated agency to provide these services since 1977.

**Note:** Laws change and this brochure is only a summary. It is not a substitute for legal advice. For more information, contact your attorney or call DRCVI.

This guide is a work product produced by DRCVI for your information.



# DISABILITY RIGHTS

CENTER OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

Advancing Justice through Protection and Advocacy

## **Community Advocacy:**

*We need to demand that persons with disabilities are able to obtain the services necessary for employment at a living wage.*

*You can help by:*

- *Learning more about your employment rights*
- *Helping a person assert their vocational goals*
- *Advocating for more employment opportunities*

**63 Cane Carlton  
Frederiksted, VI 00840**

**9003 Havensight Mall, Suite 313  
St. Thomas, VI 00802**

**Phone: St. Croix: 340.772.1200  
Fax: 340.772.0609**

**Phone: St. Thomas: 340.776.4303  
Fax: 340.774.7844**

**TTY: 340.772.4641  
Email: [info@drcvi.com](mailto:info@drcvi.com)**

## DRCVI ADVOCACY WITH VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

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- Regular advocacy on behalf of individuals with disabilities to obtain the benefits to which they are entitled to under law.
- Regular contact with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to ensure that each individual's future employment is maximized.
- Representation at individual educational program (IEP) meetings with the student who has a disability to ensure that all services are being provided and in a timely manner.
- Providing legal representation in special education lawsuit in the U.S. Virgin Islands.

This document is made possible by funding (100%) from the U.S. Department of Education/Rehabilitation Services Administration.

The contents of this document are solely the responsibility of DRCVI. DRCVI is an equal opportunity service provider.