

# FOCUS

*In connection with preparing the next Long-Range Plan, NIDRR is undertaking a thorough analysis of its employment portfolio. NIDRR's objective is to support rigorous research that yields valid and reliable evidence about the effectiveness of service delivery systems and interventions and about the economic factors affecting employment of people with disabilities. This complements the "What Works" approach that the Department has adopted for educational research, and the results should be truly useful to service organizations and policy makers.*

**Steven James Tingus**  
NIDRR Director, 10/3/03

## Employment Outcomes

Research on issues related to the employment of people with disabilities is a major priority of the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR). The purposes of research in employment, identified in NIDRR's current Long-Range Plan (1999-2003), are to:

- assess the impact of economic policy and labor market trends on the employment outcomes of people with disabilities;
- improve the effectiveness of community-based employment service programs;
- improve the effectiveness of state employment service systems;
- evaluate the contribution of employer practices and workplace supports to the employment outcomes of people with disabilities; and
- improve school-to-work transition outcomes.

In 1998, six employment-focused Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers (RRTCs) were funded by NIDRR to address each of these issues. Other RRTCs and other NIDRR projects are also funded with the research priority of "employment outcomes." Goals of this research include sharing results so they may be utilized to improve the lives of people with disabilities. Findings from NIDRR-funded research impact the areas of policy, direct service, decision-making, transition, advocacy, and more.

The NCDDR invited RRTCs with an employment focus to describe several of their most important research findings. We present brief overviews of significant outcomes and products, and how to follow up with NIDRR grantees for more in-depth information. In this issue of FOCUS, research overviews are presented from Virginia Commonwealth University's **VCU-RRTC on Workplace Supports**, the University of Montana's **RTC on Disability in Rural Communities (RTC: Rural)**, and Northern Arizona University's **American Indian Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (AIRRTC)**.

### **VCU-RRTC on Workplace Supports Virginia Commonwealth University**

Mike Barcus, Director of Training, describes the VCU-RRTC's work as "building bridges between people with disabilities and business by developing the supports necessary to obtain and maintain successful employment" (M. Barcus, personal communication, October 13, 1998). Following are overviews of three of VCU-RRTC's research studies.

#### **Human Resource Professionals and the Employment of People with Disabilities**

Organizations often rely on human resource (HR) professionals to develop or implement policies and procedures as they pertain to diversity, disability and accommodations in the workplace. As such, HR professionals play a pivotal role in the inclusion and retention of people with disabilities in workforce. An investigation into HR professionals' perceptions of barriers to employment for individuals with disabilities, and organizational policies and procedures as they pertain to disability in the workplace, was completed with 46 HR professionals.

Results indicated that employers have taken several measures in an effort to integrate people with disabilities into their organizations. Yet, employers believe that they could do more to hire people with disabilities.

Unger, D., Wehman, P., Yasuda, S., Campbell, L., & Green, H. (2001). *Human resource professionals and the employment of people with disabilities: A business perspective*. Richmond: Virginia Commonwealth University, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports.

## Front-line Supervisors' Perception of Performance of Workers with Disabilities

Front-line supervisors often have responsibility for assessing employee work performance and addressing productivity issues. Yet, much of the findings regarding employers' perceptions of individuals with disabilities in the workforce are derived from workplace personnel who have little or no experience with actual employee with disabilities. In this study, 255 supervisors of employees with known disabilities were surveyed about their experiences with employees with disabilities in their work units. Findings indicated that supervisors were quite satisfied with the work performance of employees with disabilities and that their work performance was similar to that of their nondisabled coworkers. However, supervisors' perceptions of employees' work performance differed based on the perceived functional limitations of the employee and their personal experiences with disability.

Unger, D. (2002). How do front-line supervisors in business perceive the performance of workers with disabilities? Richmond: Virginia Commonwealth University, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports.

## Progression of Disability Benefits

Progression of Disability Benefits refers to the migration of workers with work-limiting disabilities as they move through a system of economic disability benefits resulting in their ultimate placement into the Social Security disability system. This article documents and describes the workers' experiences by examining the phases of short-term, long-term and Social Security disability compensation systems. Implications for disability policy, disability management programming, and future research directions are discussed.

McMahon, B., Danczyk-Haley, C., Reid, C., Habeck, R., Kregel, J., & Owens, P. (2002). Progression of Disability Benefits. Richmond: Virginia Commonwealth University, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports.

Submitted by Valerie Brooke, Director of Training and John Kregel, Associate Center Director and Director of Research. For more information about the research conducted by the VCU-RRTC on Workplace Supports, check out the employment portal at <http://www.worksupport.com> or email Valerie Brooke, [vbroke@saturn.vcu.edu](mailto:vbroke@saturn.vcu.edu), or Dr. John Kregel, [jkregel@saturn.vcu.edu](mailto:jkregel@saturn.vcu.edu)

This research does not necessarily represent the interpretations or opinion of NIDRR or the U.S. Department of Education. Virginia Commonwealth University, Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports, Grant # H133B980036, is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution providing access to education and employment without regard to age, race, color, national origin, gender, religion, sexual orientation, veteran's status, political affiliation, or disability. If special accommodations or language translation are needed contact Valerie Brooke at: (804) 828 - 1851 (V), (804) 828 - 2494 (TTY).

The articles referenced in the above overview are posted to the VCU-RRTC employment portal:  
<http://www.worksupport.com/Main/rrtcpapers.asp>

## RTC on Disability in Rural Communities University of Montana

### Rural Employment Outcomes

Self-employment is particularly suited to rural areas where opportunities for paid-work are limited, wages and benefits are lower, and where barriers such as transportation and accessible accommodations limit job opportunities for people with disabilities. Following are examples of outcomes from six projects carried out during ten years of employment research at the RTC on Disability in Rural Communities (RTC: Rural).

### Framework for Policy and Procedures Governing the Use of Self-Employment Closures

A national survey of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) self-employment policies resulted in a model self-employment policy to assist state VR agencies. The policy includes guidelines for developing and assessing self-employment ventures including assessment of the consumer's business potential, developing a business idea, educational and technical assistance needs, business plan development, external funding sources, and agency review of self-employment plans.

For more information, see: <http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/SelEm/Monograph/StSelEm.htm>

<http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/SelEm/Factsheets/10YearRetro.htm>

### Self-Employment Manual: Steps for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

A self-employment manual was developed through a cooperative effort among RTC: Rural researchers, Client Assistance Programs, state VR agencies, Regional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Programs, and job development specialists. The manual provides an overview of the self-employment process including examples and exercises related to each phase of the process, forms and checklists to use with VR consumers, and additional resources. The manual, which is available in hard copy and on the Web, can be used as a resource and as a classroom or workshop training when combined with slides, lecture notes, and activities available from RTC: Rural. To order the manual (\$14), access the order form: <http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/Pubs/PubOrder.htm>

### First National Study of People with Disabilities who are Self-Employed

Business owners with disabilities completed a 51-question survey about their experiences in self-employment. More than half of the 330 respondents--typically middle-aged white males with some college education--made initial investments of less than \$10,000, and 30% of respondents said that their businesses supplied over half of their total household income. For more information, see:

<http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/SelEm/SelEmRePrgRpt.htm>

### Assessing Interagency Collaborations to Serve People with Disabilities in Entrepreneurship

A survey to learn about Small Business Development Center (SBDC) services for people with disabilities and linkages with VR was distributed to over half of all SBDCs across the United States, resulting in a 64 percent response rate. Of the 346 responses, 97 percent agreed that it would be helpful for

SBDC staff to work with an agency that is knowledgeable about disability when providing business start up services for a person with a disability. For more information, see: <http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/SeIEm/VRandSBDCGuidelines.htm>

### **Rural Community Economic Development though Import Substitution**

This citizen-led program conducted its first implementation in rural Eastern Utah, where it was hosted by the local VR office. The project identified 32 businesses as expansion or start-up opportunities, nine businesses were started by people with disabilities, and the two community assessment leaders (each with a disability) obtained employment.

### **Worker Cooperatives and Employment of People with Disabilities**

Employment within a worker cooperative carries many benefits for people with disabilities including fair wages, an equitable share of profits, and authority to manage a business in the best interest of worker-members. Disability-friendly worker cooperatives include (1) financial policies to assure that worker-members do not jeopardize eligibility for government disability benefits and (2) good-quality private health insurance. For more information, see:

<http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/RuEcD/Coop1.htm>

<http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/RuEcD/Coop2.htm>

<http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/RuEcD/Coop3.htm>

Submitted by Diana Spas, Information Coordinator. For more information visit the RTC: Rural Web site: <http://rtc.ruralinstitute.umt.edu/> To obtain full reports of any of the materials described, including alternate formats, please contact Diana Spas at [dspas@ruralinstitute.umt.edu](mailto:dspas@ruralinstitute.umt.edu), (406) 243-5760.

For research-related questions, contact Nancy Arnold: [nancy@ruralinstitute.umt.edu](mailto:nancy@ruralinstitute.umt.edu)  
Tom Seekins: [ruraldoc@ruralinstitute.umt.edu](mailto:ruraldoc@ruralinstitute.umt.edu), or call (406) 243-5467

This research is supported by Grant #H133B70017-01 from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, U.S. Department of Education. The opinions expressed reflect those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Department of Education. These publications are available in Braille, large print, and ASCII DOS text formats.

## **American Indian Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (AIRRTC) Northern Arizona University**

Since 1983, the AIRRTC has maintained a national emphasis on research, research-dissemination, training, technical assistance, and dissemination activities that have been designed to improve rehabilitation services and the employment status of American Indians and Alaska Natives with disabilities. Three employment outcomes research studies are presented.

### **An Analysis of Disability and Employment Outcome Data for American Indians and Alaska Natives**

The purpose of the project was to compile a coherent summary of data on American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN) with disabilities and their employment status in order to assist in planning rehabilitation strategies and to recommend better ways to collect data. The AIRRTC research represents an important

opportunity to provide detailed statistical information about American Indians and Alaska Natives with disabilities, and their employment prospects—information that is commonplace for larger unserved and underserved populations.

Data disaggregated through the AIRRTC research provide a much sounder basis for policy and planning by VR, tribes, urban Indian centers, and Indian communities across the country. For example, initial analyses of the RSA-911 database identified alcohol abuse or dependence, arthritis and rheumatism, diabetes mellitus, and disabilities resulting from diabetes as being more frequent among AI/AN than among other ethnic groups in the database. The results of the AIRRTC research also demonstrate that current major national surveys sponsored by a variety of federal agencies, and based on scientific sampling procedures, do not collect information from enough American Indians and Alaska Natives to form a basis for reliable conclusions, and that these surveys accordingly need to “over-sample” American Indians and Alaska Natives.

Daugherty, R., White, M. & Schacht, M. R. (2003). An analysis of disability and employment outcome data for American Indians and Alaska Natives. Executive Summary, Project No. R-48. Flagstaff, AZ: AIRRTC, Institute for Human Development.

The full report is available on request. Also available for download:

Word format: <http://www4.nau.edu/ihd/airrtc/word/R48.doc>

PDF format: <http://www4.nau.edu/ihd/airrtc/pdfs/R48.PDF>

### **Improving Employment Outcomes among American Indians through Assistive Technology**

The purpose of this preliminary study was to compare the rate of use of assistive technology (AT) services and devices by American Indians and Alaska Natives with that of other ethnically diverse groups, identify barriers to use of services, and examine consumer satisfaction regarding AT. AIRRTC researchers examined data regarding AT from several large national databases and conducted a survey of American Indians with AT needs. These data supported the hypothesis that American Indians and Alaska Natives are not receiving AT services or using AT devices at the same rate as other races. We were also able to support the hypothesis that assistive devices such as hearing aids are underutilized by American Indians and Alaska Natives who need them. In addition, we found support for the hypothesis that socioeconomic factors and financial barriers compromise the availability and affordability of AT services and devices to American Indians with disabilities.

Schacht, R.M., Gahungu, A., & Gallagher, L. (2002). *Improving employment outcomes among American Indians through assistive technology: A preliminary study*. Final Report, Project No. R-47. Flagstaff, AZ: AIRRTC, Institute for Human Development.

This report is available for download:

Word format: <http://www4.nau.edu/ihd/airrtc/word/improving-employment.doc>

PDF format: <http://www4.nau.edu/ihd/airrtc/pdfs/improving-employment.PDF>

## Relationship between Consumer Satisfaction and Employment Outcomes for American Indians and Alaska Natives

The Federal government has mandated that agencies providing rehabilitation services determine the satisfaction of their clients with those services, with special consideration given to redressing patterns of inequitable treatment of ethnically diverse populations. AIRRTC researchers collected existing data to answer questions regarding the creation, implementation, outcome data, and use of consumer satisfaction surveys for American Indians who have received rehabilitation services.

The AIRRTC research report is based on 42 example survey instruments collected from agencies in 18 states, as well as 19 general agency reports and 193 individual existing surveys collected from agencies in 12 states. Participating agencies were affiliated with tribal vocational rehabilitation (VR), state VR, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), or Projects With Industries (PWI).

AIRRTC results found that present survey practices usually do not facilitate a reliable or valid understanding of consumer satisfaction for American Indians at either the national or the local level. Researchers recommended training for administrators in culturally appropriate collection of consumer satisfaction data, in formats that will render information valid and reliable, and applicable to American Indians.

White, M., Williams-Joseph, D., & Gahungu, A. (2002). *An examination of the relationship between consumer satisfaction and employment outcomes for rehabilitated and non-rehabilitated American Indians and Alaska Natives*. Final Report, Project No. R-50. Flagstaff, AZ: AIRRTC, Institute for Human Development. Also available for download:

Also available for download:

Word format:

<http://www4.nau.edu/ihd/airrtc/word/R50finalreport.doc>

PDF format:

<http://www4.nau.edu/ihd/airrtc/pdfs/R50finalreport.PDF>

Submitted by Priscilla Sanderson, Project Director. For more information about AIRRTC's research, please visit the AIRRTC Web site: <http://www4.nau.edu/ihd/airrtc/> Contact Priscilla Sanderson at [Priscilla.Sanderson@nau.edu](mailto:Priscilla.Sanderson@nau.edu), or call (928) 523-5581.

Funded by the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR), Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC, Grant No. H133B30068. The contents of this report are the responsibility of the American Indian Rehabilitation Research and Training Center and no official endorsement by the U.S. Department of Education should be inferred. Northern Arizona University is an Equal Opportunity/Affirmative Action Institution. This report is available in alternate formats by contacting the Institute for Human Development at (928) 523-4791.

## Other Rehabilitation Research and Training Centers focusing on the employment outcomes research priority include:

### National Center on the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports

University of Hawaii at Manoa

<http://www.rrtc.hawaii.edu/>

Principal Investigator: Robert Stodden, Ph.D.

Contact: Juana Tabali-Weir  
[juana@hawaii.edu](mailto:juana@hawaii.edu), (808) 956-3975

### RRTC for Economic Research on Employment Policy for Persons with Disabilities

Cornell University

<http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/rrtc/>

Principal Investigators: Susanne Bruyère, Ph.D. and Richard Burkhauser, Ph.D. at Cornell University;

Contact: Susanne Bruyère, Ph.D.  
[smb23@cornell.edu](mailto:smb23@cornell.edu), (607) 255-7727

### RRTC on Blindness and Low Vision

Mississippi State University

<http://www.blind.msstate.edu/>

Principal Investigator: J. Elton Moore, Ph.D.

Contact: Kelly Schaefer  
[schaefer@ra.msstate.edu](mailto:schaefer@ra.msstate.edu), (662) 325-2001

### RRTC on Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) to Improve Employment Outcomes

University of Wisconsin, Stout Research and Training Center (SVRI)

<http://www.rtc.uwstout.edu/>

Principal Investigator: Frederick E. Menz, Ph.D.

Contact: Julie Larson  
[larsonej@uwstout.edu](mailto:larsonej@uwstout.edu), (715) 232-1389

### RRTC on State Systems and Employment

University of Massachusetts Boston and Children's Hospital Boston

<http://www.communityinclusion.org/rrtc/>

Principal Investigator:

William E. Kiernan, Ph.D.  
Contact: John Butterworth, Ph.D.

[john.butterworth@umb.edu](mailto:john.butterworth@umb.edu), (617) 287-4357

### RRTC on Workforce Investment and Employment Policy for Persons with Disabilities

University of Iowa

<http://disability.law.uiowa.edu/lhpdcrrtc/>

Principal Investigators: Peter D. Blanck, Ph.D., JD; Michael Morris; others at partner sites.  
Contact: James Schmeling  
[james-schmeling@uiowa.edu](mailto:james-schmeling@uiowa.edu), (319) 335-8458

Available online: <http://www.ncddr.org/du/products/focus/focus6/>



The NCDDR assists, through information and technical assistance, NIDRR grantees with identifying and crafting dissemination strategies. These strategies are designed to meet the needs of a grantee's unique target audience. NCDDR also analyzes and reports on dissemination trends relevant to disability research.

*Focus: A Technical Brief from the National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research* was produced by the National Center for the Dissemination of Disability Research (NCDDR) under grant H133A990008-A from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) in the U.S. Department of



Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS).

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) operates the NCDDR. SEDL is an Equal Employment Opportunity/Affirmative Action Employer and is committed to affording equal employment opportunities for all individuals in all employment matters. Neither SEDL nor the NCDDR discriminate on the basis of age, sex,

race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, marital or veteran status, or the presence of a disability. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal government.

© Copyright 2003  
Southwest Educational Development Laboratory

Available in alternate formats upon request.