

Seamless Transition

through Communication and Collaboration with Student,
Family, Schools, OVR and Community Partners

Listening is key...

Frequent communications across systems with all team members helps to keep everyone working towards the same goal at the same time.

To assist Pennsylvanians with **disabilities**
to secure and maintain
employment and independence.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services

- Early Reach Initiative
- Pre-Employment Transition Services
- Diagnostic Services
- Vocational Evaluation
- Counseling and Guidance
- Transition Services
- Restoration Services
- Training Services
- Vehicle/Home Modification
- Placement Services

Additional Blindness and Visual Services

- Blindness Skills Training
- Instruction: Mobility
- Instruction: Daily Living
- Independent Living Skills
- Specialized Children's Services
- Randolph-Sheppard Business Enterprise Program (BEP)

Western Region

- DuBois
- Erie (+ BBVS)
- New Castle
- Pittsburgh (+ BBVS)
- Washington

Central Region

- Altoona (+ BBVS)
- Harrisburg (+ BBVS)
- *Hiram G. Andrews Center (HGAC)*
- Johnstown
- *OVR Central Office*
- Williamsport
- York

Eastern Region

- Allentown
- Norristown
- Philadelphia (+ BBVS)
- Reading
- Wilkes-Barre (+ BBVS)

- **David Ritter**, OVR Transition Counselor (VRC) worked in the Reading District Office from June, 2015 to December, 2019, then transferred to the Harrisburg District Office
- **Michele Ebert**, Employment Coordinator with
- VIA of the Lehigh Valley from 2018 to present



District Office(s) Represented

County(ies) Served

OVR Reading District Office

Berks, Schuylkill

OVR Harrisburg District Office

Dauphin, Cumberland, Perry, Juniata,
Mifflin, Lebanon

VIA of the Lehigh Valley

Berks, Bucks, Carbon, Lehigh, Monroe,
Northampton

Information in this session focuses on a
STATEWIDE program/initiative, as implemented
with **LOCAL** partners.

“It takes a village...”

Meet each student where they are starting from (developmentally, emotionally, experientially). Listen to them, then help them make progress. It takes time and communicating frequently across and between agencies and systems.

There is NO User Manual

- Transitions can be challenging, especially without experience
- Parents and others who provide a good support system at home for students are vital to ongoing success
- Transitions can be hard for everyone: students, parents, employers, schools, and support professionals
- Communication is key: Listening first, then assessing, then exploring
- Frequent feedback is important: keeping each team member up-to-date and moving towards the same goal
- We KNOW what we know; we DON'T know what we DON'T KNOW

- Parents are responsible to help their child grow, develop and mature to more independence and success
- LEAs (schools) are responsible to help each student make progress with their Transition plan
- Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) are responsible to help each client achieve success, working with the funding agencies
- The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) is responsible to collaborate with each customer to help them move towards successful employment
- The Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) is responsible to provide Supports Coordination to the customer/family

- The student/client/customer is both the primary beneficiary and most important partner in this collaboration



- **Jeff Lehr**, Transition Coordinator for the Wilson School District in West Reading helped student Casey Schmehl and her parents to navigate through her Transition and towards success.
- In-school class work on employability skills, in-school volunteer activities
- School-supported Community Work Instruction (CWI) with school personnel
- School-funded CWI with Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP)
- School & OVR funded Pre-ETS Paid Work Experience (PWE)

- VIA of the Lehigh Valley started working with Casey for the 2017-2018 school year
- VIA is a service provider that was contracted directly with the school district
- The goal for Casey was to place her in a volunteer position where she could build her employment skills
- Wilson HS and VIA's goal was to expose Casey to other opportunities and expand her options for part-time employment
- Casey started her volunteer opportunity with VIA at the Berks County Humane Society

- Casey received volunteer of the month at the Humane Society
- Also Casey received an award for “Most animal enrichment hours”



Casey volunteers again



- Casey volunteered again through the collaboration of Wilson HS and VIA of the Lehigh Valley for the 2018-2019 school year
- Casey worked with VIA 5 days a week to develop her employment skills
- Casey returned to volunteering at the Humane Society to start

- While at the Humane Society, Casey moved up levels of dog walking responsibilities
- Victoria, her job coach from VIA, explored other opportunities in the community with Casey
- Victoria and Casey attended a coloring class 1x a week and also attended a knitting class
- Casey was able to develop social skills and self-confidence during these opportunities

Casey entered into a Paid Work Experience (PWE) on April 1st, 2019 in a collaboration between OVR, Wilson HS and VIA. The picture is Casey on her first day of work.



Casey enters into a PWE



- Victoria from VIA worked to get Casey a position with Michael's craft store volunteer work program
- The details of the program were that the participant would work at Michael's but she would have to be paid by an outside agency and would not be an employee of Michael's
- This was accomplished with a Pre-ETS Paid Work Experience stipend through OVR

- As Casey prepared herself with skills and maturity, OVR and Wilson HS agreed she is ready for a part-time paid position in December, 2018
- An obstacle emerged when OVR had to temporarily pull back on funding Pre-ETS services at that time
- Collaboration was made: Wilson HS paid for the job coaching provided by VIA; OVR paid for the stipend, also provided by VIA
- This allowed the experience to be a success

- In June of 2019, Casey graduated from Wilson HS
- Casey expressed that she wanted to find a part-time job
- As an adult Casey was eligible for adult services through OVR
- Casey chose to continue with VIA of the Lehigh Valley as her provider for job development

With support through VIA and OVR, Casey got a position at Target, in August 2019.



Working at Target



- Casey obtained a part-time position with Target
- She continued with job coaching provided by VIA of the Lehigh Valley
- The job coaching was funded by OVR

- **Each student is unique.** That’s the “Individualized” in the IEP (Individualized Education Plan), the “Individualized” in the OVR IPE (Individualized Plan for Employment), and the “Individual” in the ODP ISP (Individual Support Plan)
- As students progress through their school educational experiences and as part of their IEP, the family is encouraged at appropriate times to reach out to other community agencies like OVR and Supports Coordinating agencies, especially the closer one gets to exiting school
- Adding community agency team members can help facilitate a smooth transition from high school, like a marathon relay race

- Every LEA (school), and each agency is resourced differently at different times and for different services
- Working together, and keeping communications open can help create opportunities for different approaches for each individual
- OVR Pre-ETS services are designed to supplement Transition services being provided by the LEA, so knowing what a school/district is already doing is very helpful
- In Casey's case, Mr. Lehr asked OVR to "hold off" on providing a Paid Work Experience (PWE) too early, because he knew Casey and if she was offered PWE too soon, it may become a barrier to her volunteer work experience

- As we approached the mid-year point of Casey's final year of high school, the team (Casey, her parents, Transition Coordinator Jeff Lehr, and OVR counselor) developed a plan to utilize the same job coaching agency that Casey had been using through the school, VIA, to pursue a Pre-ETS Paid Work Experience (PWE)
- Between when PWE Development began and finding a work site, OVR put an emergency stop to all Pre-ETS services temporarily
- VR Transition Counselor spoke with VIA and Mr. Lehr, inquiring about the possibility of OVR funding either an OJT or Stipend, with Wilson School District covering the costs for the job coach hours
- All were in agreement, and this plan was proposed to OVR and approved as a case-by-case exception under the circumstances

- From Casey: “I’ll be flexible.” “She taught me how to slow down.” “I learned how to apply for jobs, do my resume, and cover letters.”
- From Pat, Casey’s mom: “Victoria worked constantly to learn how to understand Casey and to communicate with her, what she likes and dislikes. Victoria really made a commitment to communicate regularly with Casey and us. That wasn’t always the case with other providers, and we didn’t know what to expect at the time, because we were new to this process.” “It’s Casey’s growth in the whole process, and the steps along the way at Target: 1) being WITH her in the first few days; 2) having a Debrief after each shift to help Casey process it.”

Questions?

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