

# Vocational Rehabilitation: An Employment Guide for People with Epilepsy Second Edition

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finding a cure for epilepsy & seizures (faces)  
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## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION FOR PEOPLE WITH EPILEPSY

A productive and satisfying work life is an important component to overall quality of life. Most people with epilepsy have the potential to achieve gratifying employment. Whether you have been out of the work force for a period of time or have never held a job, vocational rehabilitation services can help you train for and find employment that meets your individual needs.

There are many not-for-profit private organizations and public agencies that offer vocational rehabilitation services. Many of these programs work in partnership. Others stand alone. Not all programs offer all services; not all programs specialize in services for people with chronic and disabling conditions, and not all programs will be available in your area. It can be a confusing and frustrating process to sort through all the options and find the right program for you. Knowing where to start can help.

Vocational rehabilitation services include the following:

**Diagnostic evaluation** - to assess any disability and determine current skills for a career development plan.

**Counseling** - to set goals, make choices, determine job skills training needed and provide support.

**Training** - specific and general job skills, compensatory techniques to improve memory functioning and concentration, job search strategies, interviewing skills and job coaching, resume writing, and legal rights.

**Referral** - to on-the-job training programs and other supported job experiences and employer education.

**Job placement** - in the competitive work force, in the home, in supported community employment or in sheltered workshops.

**Post-employment services** - short-term and long-term support during employment to help you keep your job and job accommodation assistance.

**Assistance** - in working with related agencies such as the Social Security

Administration, the Department of Social Services, the Office of Mental Health, the Veterans Administration, and the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

## **FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL AGENCIES**

Federal law requires that every state provide vocational rehabilitation services to the public. The agency responsible for administering the program will vary from state to state as will the range and extent of services offered. The Department of Labor and Department of Education, Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities and the Social Security Administration are some of the public (government) agencies that can help you get vocational rehabilitation services.

### **Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID)**

If you live in New York, most agencies you contact will refer you directly to the Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) in the State Department of Education.

VESID "helps people with disabilities who are eligible for vocational rehabilitation to find and keep suitable employment." VESID offers the full range of vocational rehabilitation services through some in-house programs, but mostly through referrals.

VESID is connected to a large referral network of both public and private sector organizations that provide vocational rehabilitation and related services. VESID can also refer to trade schools, colleges and universities if rehabilitation requires additional or specialized education, as well as to special education programs at the grade school and preschool levels for children.

To determine if you are eligible for VESID sponsorship (that is, to participate in a vocational rehabilitation program and have it paid for by the state), you must have an evaluation. The evaluation includes a job-skills assessment, job history, career goals, and medical exam to assess how your disability affects your ability to work. If you are found to be eligible, a VESID counselor will identify appropriate programs for you in your area and will assist you in finding the best match.

If you want to go to a particular vocational program that you already know about, you may choose to be referred there. However, since most people don't know in advance about all the potential options, it is usually best to let VESID find the program(s) that are most likely to be successful for you.

## Vocational Rehabilitation Offices

For the office nearest you, call 1 (800) 222-JOBS (5627), or in the tri-state area:

### **Regional VESID Coordinator**

Manhattan District Office  
116 West 32nd St., 6th Floor  
New York, NY 10001  
(212) 630-2301  
(212) 630-2302 (TTY)  
[www.vesid.nysed.gov](http://www.vesid.nysed.gov)

### **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

135 East State St.  
PO Box 398  
Trenton, NJ 08625  
(609) 292-5987  
(609) 292-2919 (TTY)  
[www.nj.gov/labor/dvrs/vrsindex.html](http://www.nj.gov/labor/dvrs/vrsindex.html)

### **Bureau of Rehabilitation**

25 Signourney St., 11th Floor  
Hartford, CT 06106  
(860) 424-4844  
(860) 424-4839 (TTY/TDD)  
(800) 537-2549  
[www.brs.state.ct.us](http://www.brs.state.ct.us)

### **Client Assistance Program (CAP) NYS Commission on Quality Care**

STATE OFFICE  
401 State St.  
Schenectady, NY 12305  
(518) 388-2892  
(800) 624-4143  
[www.cqc.state.ny.us](http://www.cqc.state.ny.us)

## **Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD)**

NYC Regional Field Office  
75 Morton St., 6th floor  
New York, NY 10014  
(212) 229-3231  
[www.omr.state.ny.us](http://www.omr.state.ny.us)

## **New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH)**

44 Holland Ave.  
Albany, NY 12229  
(518) 473-8561  
[www.omh.state.ny.us](http://www.omh.state.ny.us)

## **Social Security Administration (SSA)**

For information on the Social Security Disabilities Services Office (SSDI)  
(800) 772-1213  
[www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov)

## **Metro NY Developmental Disability Services (Manhattan Division)**

75 Morton St.  
New York, NY 10014  
(212) 229-3216  
[www.omr.state.ny.us](http://www.omr.state.ny.us)

## **NY Lawyers for the Public Interest**

Manhattan Office  
Bureau of Protection Advocacy  
151 West 30th St., 11th Floor  
New York, NY 10001  
(212) 244-4664  
[www.nylpi.org](http://www.nylpi.org)

Even once you are enrolled in a particular program, a VESID counselor will continue to monitor your progress. If you are not satisfied with the vocational rehabilitation services received by one of VESID's vendors, have questions regarding your rights in applying to or receiving services from VESID, or otherwise need help in understanding the programs and services available, a "Client Assistance Program" (CAP) advocate will

work with you to find a better program to suit your needs. CAP is a type of consumer protection agency for New Yorkers with disabilities who are receiving services from VESID or any other federally funded vocational rehabilitation service agency. In New York, CAP is run by the New York State Commission on Quality of Care. Services are available free of charge.

VESID vocational diagnostic evaluation and training services are free. Other services, primarily educational, may require proof of financial need or are offered on a sliding scale. If a potential client is mentally retarded or developmentally disabled, both your local VESID office and the Office of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (OMRDD) should be called at the same time. This will facilitate coordination of services and ensure supportive employment and long-term follow-up in an organization that has appropriate placements.

VESID has access to all the major vocation-related information sources including the Department of Labor job listings, advocacy groups, and resource networks for people with disabilities. VESID also has the Family Information Network about Disabilities (FIND) that provides information on disability-related services in your state offered by a variety of private and not-for-profit organizations and government agencies.

You can call VESID yourself, or you may be referred to VESID through your physician or another healthcare professional. Orientation meetings are held every Tuesday to answer questions, describe the process and help you fill out the necessary paperwork. VESID is probably the best place to call first. VESID has district offices in all the boroughs and 15 local offices statewide. Note that if you are not eligible to enroll in a VESID sponsored vocational rehabilitation program you may still be entitled to receive free referral advice and counseling.

## **NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS**

Among the private not-for-profit agencies that offer specific vocational rehabilitation services, the variation in programs and related services is even greater than that found among the government funded agencies. Not every one will be exactly right for you.

Most of the existing vocational rehabilitation programs are sponsored by VESID. That means that in order to participate in most of these programs, VESID needs to determine that you are eligible. For this reason, it may

make sense to go to VESID first. Also, VESID may be able to find a program that you did not know about that may be better suited to your individual needs. On the other hand, you might prefer to go to one of these organizations directly to get a feel for what services are available or what the staff is like. Check to see if an organization you are interested in learning more about offers an orientation meeting that you can attend at no obligation.

Some of the most recognized programs available are briefly described below.

### **Epilepsy Foundation (EF)**

To discuss work-related issues (i.e. discrimination, disclosure, preparing for employment), inquiries about employer education, or to participate in a general support group for people with epilepsy, your local EF affiliate is a great place to begin.

The national EF sponsors two programs: **JobTech** and **JobTalk**.

The **JobTech Employment Program** is the most comprehensive employment program of its kind developed by the Foundation. It brings new ideas and approaches to employment and training services for people with seizures. JobTech helps people with epilepsy find jobs in technology and customer service fields. The program focuses on customer service training, computer skills, advanced computer and technology applications and entrepreneurial training. JobTech eligibility includes verification of the individual's disability, an interest and a willingness to commit to the program's goals and demands. The closest JobTech program to NYC is the program offered at the Epilepsy Foundation of New Jersey. (Contact Demeri Minkoff at the EF of Southern New Jersey office at 216 Hadden Avenue, Westmont, NJ 08108. Phone (856) 858-5900 ext. 404. [www.efnj.com](http://www.efnj.com))

**JobTalk** is a new online feature that includes a monthly chat session where experts answer questions about employment-related issues. Experts include corporate executives and Americans with Disability Act (ADA) specialists that understand the unique challenges epilepsy can bring to the workplace. JobTalk also offers a chat room and discussion forum where you can talk about employment issues with others who may be dealing with similar issues. For more information on JobTalk, please go to [www.epilepsyfoundation.org](http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org).

Some of the local EF affiliates across the country have secured their own funding to support training and employment programs specifically for people with epilepsy in their community. Usually, this funding comes from the state Vocational Rehabilitation Services or Developmental Disabilities agencies. What each affiliate can offer will vary so it is best to contact the one nearest you.

In our area, the **Epilepsy Foundation of New York City (EFNYC)** offers support groups, other job-related counseling services, information and referral to training programs, and opportunities to practice job skills and socialization through its on-site Volunteer Program. **The Epilepsy Society of Southern New York, Inc.** offers the full range of vocational rehabilitation services through a supported employment and competitive employment program which includes job readiness training, vocational counseling, job development, job placement, and job coaching support. We are an employment network for New York State Ticket to Work program that offers job development services.

#### **TRI-STATE**

**Epilepsy Foundation of New York City**  
305 7th Ave., 12th Floor  
New York, NY 10001  
(212) 633-2930  
[www.efnyc.org](http://www.efnyc.org)

**Epilepsy Foundation of Long Island**  
506 Stewart Ave.  
Garden City, NY 11530  
(516) 739-7733  
[www.efli.org](http://www.efli.org)

**Epilepsy Society of Southern New York**  
One Blue Hill Plaza  
Suite 340, Box 1745  
Pearl River, NY 10965  
(845) 627-0627  
[www.essny.com](http://www.essny.com)

**Epilepsy Foundation of Connecticut**  
386 Main St.  
Middletown, CT 06457  
(860) 346-1924  
[www.epilepsyCT.net](http://www.epilepsyCT.net)

**Epilepsy Foundation of New Jersey**  
429 River View Plaza  
Trenton, NJ 08611  
(800) 336-5843  
(609) 392-4900  
[www.efnj.com](http://www.efnj.com)

**National Epilepsy Foundation**  
4351 Garden City Dr.  
Landover, MD 20785  
(800) 332-1000  
[www.epilepsyfoundation.org](http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org)

**The Epilepsy Institute**  
257 Park Ave. South, Suite 302  
New York, NY 10010  
(212) 677-8550  
[www.epilepsyinstitute.org](http://www.epilepsyinstitute.org)

**Epilepsy Foundation-Rochester-Syracuse**  
1650 South Ave.  
Rochester, NY 14620-3091  
(585) 442-443  
[www.epilepsy-uny.org](http://www.epilepsy-uny.org)

**The Epilepsy Institute** is an organization designed to provide comprehensive social services to people with epilepsy. It has New York City's only specialized work readiness and vocational programs exclusively serving people with epilepsy. Services include career counseling and guidance by certified vocational professionals, on workplace issues specific to epilepsy; a supported work program where counselors help you obtain employment and develop specific work skills both on and off the job site; and a part time day-rehabilitation program designed to increase independent living skills and provide work experience in the community. To be eligible for any of these programs, you must have developed epilepsy by the age of 22 and reside in NYC. The supported employment program requires VESID approval.

### **Federation Employment and Guidance Service (FEGS)**

315 Hudson St.

New York, NY 10013

(212) 366-8246

[www.fegs.org](http://www.fegs.org)

FEGS is a large, well-established not-for-profit, non-sectarian human service agency that provides training and integrated employment services to individuals with physical, developmental and/or psychiatric disabilities among other people in need. A full range of services are provided including comprehensive pre-placement services (such as assessment and evaluation, job development and job matching to ability, pre-employment counseling, job skills familiarization to job placement and post-employment services (such as job coaching, intensive on-site counseling and after work counseling). Programs are largely supported by VESID, OMRDD or OMH.

### **International Center for the Disabled (ICD)**

340 East 24th St.

New York, NY 10010

(212) 585 6000

[www.icdrehab.org](http://www.icdrehab.org)

ICD is a comprehensive outpatient rehabilitation facility that has operated in NYC for the last 75 years. Vocational rehabilitation services include the Vocational Improvement Program-a minimum 6 month structured vocational experience in a variety of work settings either on-site or in the community, and the Work Skills Training Program-to train potential

employees for clerical roles (receptionist, messenger, data entry), paraprofessional positions in human services and health care fields, and in the food service industry. Memory and attention training and other supportive services are also offered. ICD's vocational programs are VESID sponsored.

**Young Adult Institute (YAI)/  
National Institute for People with Disabilities**

Central Office  
460 West 14th St.  
New York, NY 10001-2382  
(212) 273-6182  
[www.yai.org](http://www.yai.org)

This organization is actually composed of six different corporations representing a network of non-profit health and human services agencies to help people with disabilities and their families. The Employment Initiatives Department has nine supported work training programs in New York City, Westchester county and Long Island. Job placement programs and ongoing services in therapy and counseling in the Vocational Rehabilitation Clinic are also available. People with developmental disabilities or mental retardation may particularly benefit from the YAI employment programs.

YAI is under the auspices of OMRDD.

**National Center for Disability Services (NCDS)**

201 I.U. Willets Rd.  
Albertson, NY 11507  
(516) 465-1400  
[www.ncds.org](http://www.ncds.org)

NCDS is a multifaceted non-profit disability organization that has an assistive technology center, a distance learning center, and research programs. Its largest component is "Abilities," which is a vocational evaluation, training, and placement program that puts over 1200 people a year into employment settings, many in the NYC area.

Vocational rehabilitation services are often available at major medical centers. The following are two excellent options in the NYC area.

**Rusk Institute of Rehabilitation Medicine (RIRM)**

NYU Medical Center  
660 1st Ave., 7th Floor  
New York, NY 10016

Supervisor for Out-Patient Services: (212) 263-6037

Vocational Services: (212) 263-6053

[www.ruskinstitute.org](http://www.ruskinstitute.org)

Even if you do not need the full spectrum of rehabilitative services offered by RIRM (Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech/Language Therapy, etc.), you may be referred specifically to the RIRM Vocational Services Department. This program provides a comprehensive range of services for people with a variety of disabilities and special needs including: individual and group counseling, scholastic evaluation/school planning, career exploration, vocational evaluation, work adjustment training, transitional employment, in-depth job analysis, employer services, referral to training programs and community services, job-seeking skills training, job placement/post-employment services.

Participation in this program can require a full time commitment depending on your needs: the jobs skills evaluation is a 3 week program (minimum), 5 days a week, 9:00 am-1:30 pm. On-the-job training and supportive employment experience (a minimum 12 week internship) is usually accomplished on-site in one of the departments at NYU. Another feature that characterizes the program at RIRM is the “job mart”-a network of community businesses and large corporations (the Business Advisory Group) that come to RIRM specifically to hire graduates.

There are very few needs that cannot be met well by the RIRM program. RIRM's vocational rehabilitation programs are VESID sponsored, so you will need to go to VESID first. However, once you get your VESID application, a RIRM counselor can help you fill it out. RIRM is not reimbursable through medicaid or medicare.

### **The Mount Sinai Medical Center**

1 Gustave L. Levy Place

New York, NY 10029

General Information: (212) 241-6500

### **Department of Rehabilitation Medicine Vocational Services Program**

5 East 98th St.

Box 1240B

New York, NY 10029

Vocational Counselor: (212) 241-3981

## **Rehabilitation/Vocational Services Program**

Box 1242

New York, NY 10029

Intake Counselor: (212) 987-7189

### **Department of Psychiatric Rehabilitation**

Vocational services may be received from either the Department of Psychiatric Rehabilitation or the Department of Rehabilitation Medicine. If a potential client has a significant and persistent psychiatric disability as well as epilepsy, the Psychiatric Rehabilitation Program at Mount Sinai may be the most appropriate program available. RIRM and VESID will frequently refer here for this purpose. However, in order to participate in this particular program all psychiatric treatment must be provided by the clinical staff at Mount Sinai. Vocational rehabilitation services, supported employment experience in the Mount Sinai medical community (Work Adjustment Training Program), and job placement services are offered in both departments. The programs are Medicaid and insurance reimbursable, or you can be sponsored by VESID. Self-pay on a sliding scale is also available.

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Listed below are a few of the many organizations that do not necessarily provide vocational rehabilitation services, but can help as an information resource on rehabilitation and disability.

#### **Bender Consulting Services, Inc.**

Bender Consulting Services, Inc.'s mission is to provide superior consulting services to our consumers while creating employment and career opportunities, independence and freedom for people with disabilities.

Penn Center West III, Suite 223

Pittsburgh, PA 15276

Phone (412) 787-8567

[www.benderconsult.com](http://www.benderconsult.com)

#### **[www.disabilityinfo.gov](http://www.disabilityinfo.gov)**

A government-funded web site that provides links to jobs and resume banks for employees and job-seekers with disabilities. One of its features is "Job Link," a nationwide listing of employers who seek to recruit and hire qualified job candidates with disabilities for open positions in their organizations. Included in each entry is a link directly to the company's career opportunities and job listings.

[www.diversityworld.com](http://www.diversityworld.com)

206-849 Almar Ave., Suite C

Santa Cruz, CA 95060

Phone (831) 457-2709

This web site features a variety of national contracts for enhancing the effective participation of people with employment barriers in the workplace. Job posting links can help people find a position that's right for them.

### **[New York State Rehabilitation Association \(NYSRA\), Inc.](#)**

155 Washington Ave., Suite 410

Albany, NY 12210-2332

(518) 449-2976      (518) 449-2993 (TTY)

[www.nyrehab.org](http://www.nyrehab.org)

This is a statewide not-for-profit organization that represents and assists rehabilitation agencies (not individuals) in providing rehabilitation services and employment opportunities. Many good links are available at this web site.

### **[New York State Office of Advocate for Persons with Disabilities \(OAPwD\)](#)**

One Empire State Plaza, Suite 1001

Albany, NY 12223-1150

(518) 473-4538

(800) 522-4369 (Voice/TTY/Spanish)

[www.oapwd.org](http://www.oapwd.org)

OAPwD information, referral, and technical assistance services help ensure that people with disabilities have full access to the programs, services and supports necessary to achieve and maintain independence and full community participation. The Advocate's Office collaborates with the disability community and advises the Governor, the Legislature and other government agencies about existing and emerging issues.

### **[National Organization on Disability \(NOD\)](#)**

910 Sixteenth St., NW., Suite 600

Washington, D.C. 20006

(202) 293-5960

(202) 293-5968 (TTY)

[www.nod.org](http://www.nod.org)

[ability@nod.org](mailto:ability@nod.org) (e-mail)

NOD is a national disability resource network devoted to providing access to information that can help people of all ages and with all types of disabilities be full participants in all aspects of life. The resources on the

web site are both broad and comprehensive with good links to other related sites.

### **The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY)**

PO Box 1492

Washington, D.C. 20013-1492

(800) 695-0285 (TTY)

<http://nichcy.org>

NICHCY is a national disabilities information and referral center for families, educators and other professionals, focusing on children and youth. The organization offers personal responses to your specific questions, a variety of publications, referrals to other organizations and sources of help and database searches.

### **The National Rehabilitation Information Center (NARIC)**

4200 Forbes Blvd, Suite 202

Lanham, MD 20706

(800) 346-2742

(301) 459-5984 (TTY)

[www.naric.com](http://www.naric.com)

NARIC serves anyone interested in the research literature in disability and rehabilitation. Resources include access to research literature, professional publications, local and national events, and on-line and off-line databases. Conduct your own searches, or NARIC staff can conduct a customized database query to answer your particular question.

### **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**

US Dept of Justice

Civil Rights Division

950 Penn Ave., N.W.

Disability Rights Section - NYAV

Washington, D.C. 20530

(800) 514-0301 or (800) 514-0383 (TTY)

(202) 514-0301

[www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm)

The ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability. This site contains all the information you might want regarding your legal rights to employment if you are disabled. Copies of the ADA 1990 (full 90 pages) can be obtained free from the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Disability Policy.

113 Hart Senate Office Building

Washington, D.C. 20510

(202) 224-6265

(202) 224-3457 (TTY)

Any person who believes that his or her job rights have been violated have the right to file a charge of discrimination with U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

(800) 669-4000 (voice)

(800) 669-6820 (TTY)

### **Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA)**

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Service (OSERS)

U.S. Department of Education

Room 5081

400 Maryland Avenue S.W.

Washington, D.C. 20202-2800

(202) 245-7488

[www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/RSA](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/RSA)

This is a federal agency that operates out of the U.S. Department of Education. RSA helps formulate and implement policies affecting individuals with disabilities and serves as a resource and clearinghouse of information for service providers in the development of programs, develops disability related eligibility criteria for RSA programs, and provides leadership in assuring equitable access to services for all people with disabilities.

The Client Assistance Program (CAP) is administered under RSA.

### **The Ticket to Work Program**

(866) 968-7842

(866) 833-2967 (TDD)

[www.yourtickettowork.com](http://www.yourtickettowork.com)

The Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program is a new part of the Social Security program. It is designed for people who receive Social Security Disability Insurance benefits and Supplemental Security income (SSI) benefits because of disability. The goal of the program is to give disability beneficiaries the opportunity to achieve steady, long-term employment by providing them greater choices and opportunities to go to work if they choose to do so.

## **The Job Accommodation Network (JAN)**

P.O. Box 6080

Morgantown, WV 26506

(800) 526-7234 (Voice or TTY)

[www.jan.wvu.edu](http://www.jan.wvu.edu)

JAN provides information on the Americans with Disabilities Act and consulting on individualized accommodation solutions in the workplace for people with epilepsy. JAN has developed a resource list to help with finding employment opportunities. JAN is a service of the office of Disability Employment policy of the US Department of Labor, and can be found at the website above.

## **The Internet Resources for Special Children (IRSC)**

[www.irsc.org](http://www.irsc.org)

This is a non-profit search site that was put together by a parents of a disabled child to communicate information relating to the needs of children with disabilities.

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**To make recommendations or changes for the next edition of this guide, please e-mail [facescoordinator@yahoo.com](mailto:facescoordinator@yahoo.com).**