

*Consumer Handbook*  
*for*  
*Vocational Rehabilitation Services*

Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS)

Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)



April 2015

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# Table of Contents

Page	
2	Introduction
4	Overview of VR Services
	<b><u>Eligibility</u></b>
6	Will I be Eligible for BRS Services?
	<b><u>The Individualized Plan for Employment – Going to Work</u></b>
7	How Do I Make a Good Career Choice?
10	Career Exploration Notes
12	How Do I Develop an Effective and Meaningful Individualized Plan for Employment?
16	Individualized Plan for Employment Worksheet
18	Who Will Pay for the Services I Need?
19	What Will Happen to My Benefits if I Go to Work?
	<b><u>Working Together with BRS</u></b>
22	What Can I Do to Make the BRS Program Work for Me?
24	What is the SRC?
26	What Happens If I Disagree with BRS?
	<b><u>Job Placement and Follow-up Services</u></b>
33	Job Placement Services
35	Work Evaluation
37	Job Coaching and Supported Employment
39	Self-Employment Services
41	Post-Employment Services
	<b><u>Education and Training Services</u></b>
42	Employment Training
44	Financial Aid for Post-Secondary Education
47	On-the-Job Training
48	Transition from School to Work
	<b><u>Other Services</u></b>
50	Rehabilitation Technology
52	Home Modifications
54	Vehicle Modifications
57	Restoration Services
58	Summary
59	BRS Office Phone Numbers
63	Consumer Handbook Evaluation Form

## Introduction

This handbook is designed to provide general information about the vocational rehabilitation (VR) program offered through the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), a division of the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS). We hope this book will help you understand the VR program so that you will be successfully employed.

The public VR program is the result of the Rehabilitation Act and recent amendments under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA). The Rehabilitation Act is founded on the belief that all individuals with disabilities **can** work. Under this law, each state operates a program in partnership with the federal government. The cost is shared by both the state and federal governments. The goal of the program is to help people with significant disabilities to prepare for, find and keep good jobs.

There are regional and local offices throughout the state to serve you. See page 59 for locations and office phone numbers.

Once you apply, you will work with a vocational rehabilitation counselor who will determine your eligibility. This is generally a brief process but may sometimes require certain assessments or evaluations which BRS can pay for. If you are eligible, you will have many options to explore and decisions to make. First, you will develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that identifies your job goal and services you will need to achieve that goal. Your counselor can provide information and assistance in developing the plan, or you may develop the plan on your own or with help from outside resources. Your IPE will also include responsibilities for both you and BRS to meet. Once you and your counselor agree to the details in the plan, services can begin. Your IPE can be changed over time, as long as both you and your counselor agree to the changes.

Your plan, the services you receive, and the time needed to achieve your employment goal will be different from others who are also receiving services. For some, the services may include job training or job coaching. Others may need special devices such as a hearing aid or modifications to a vehicle. The services included in your plan will depend on your job goal and your specific needs.

BRS may pay for some of the services. We may also ask you to apply for other programs or benefits that can help pay for some of the costs of services you will need in your IPE. You will be encouraged to contribute to the cost of service in your plan if you are able to do so. You will also be expected to meet your responsibilities to make your plan successful such as keeping appointments, making calls, researching your employment options and staying in touch with your counselor.

**The final goal of the public VR program is employment.** If your IPE is successful, you will be able to obtain and keep a job that you can perform well and that you like. Generally, BRS will work with you until all services have been completed. We will monitor your progress for the first 90 days of employment. During this time, please tell your counselor of any concerns you may have about the job. If the job goes well during this time, we will then close your case. Please remember, you can apply to re-open your case if you have a problem on the job or circumstances change.

The information in this booklet is a detailed description of the application process and the specific services that are available. **Reading this handbook may help you achieve success toward your employment goal.** Please feel free to contact any staff member of BRS if you have questions or need any further information about services or BRS policy. You may also review our **Policy Manual** which explains the philosophical and legal guidelines that determine how we administer the VR program. It can be found on our website at <http://ct.gov/dors>; please select the BRS section in the middle of the home page and the **Policy Manual** is listed under **Publications**.

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## Overview of VR Services

The vocational rehabilitation (VR) program offers a wide range of services to individuals who are eligible. The plan for services is developed based on the individual needs of each person that BRS serves. Therefore, the services provided to one person may be very different than services provided for another person.

**As a general rule, in order for BRS to provide a service:**

- 1. You must require the service in order for you to succeed in achieving your employment goal; and**
- 2. The service must be unavailable to you through other resources.**

You are encouraged to ask your counselor or other BRS staff if you have questions about the availability or need for any particular service. The following list includes the types of services that BRS may provide, if needed:

- Evaluation services to determine eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs. Depending on your situation, this may include such things as opportunities to work at a job on a trial basis, medical or psychological tests, or other ways to learn more about your disability and vocational rehabilitation need;
- Counseling, guidance, and information about career and employment decisions. *(See page 7 for “How Do I Make a Good Career Choice?”);*
- Referral to other service providers for services not available through this program;
- *Job placement services (see page 33);*
- *Employment training (see page 42)* and other training services;
- *Physical and mental restoration services (see page 57) ;*
- Expenses for additional costs that occur while participating in a BRS evaluation or an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE);
- Transportation services;

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- Personal assistance services may be needed to assist you in performing daily living activities as a result of your disability which are necessary in order for you to achieve your job goal;
  - Interpreter or reader services;
  - Occupational licenses, tools, equipment, and initial stocks and supplies;
  - *Self-employment services* including technical assistance and consultation for the establishment of small business operations (*see page 39*);
  - *Rehabilitation technology* (*see page 50*);
  - *Transition planning from school to work* (*see page 48*);
  - *Job coaching and supported employment services* (*see page 37*);
  - Services to family members, if needed for you to achieve your employment goal; and
  - *Post-employment services* to assist you to keep your job, to get a new job, or to advance in your job (*see page 41*).

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## Will I Be Eligible for BRS Services?

Once you decide to apply for services with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), the next step is to work closely with your counselor to determine your eligibility. In general, you may be eligible for services if:

- you have a significant impairment that interferes with your ability to work; and
- you require vocational rehabilitation services to attain or maintain employment.

Your eligibility may be established immediately if you are receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and you plan to go to work. It may take several weeks to determine your eligibility if information concerning your disability must be verified from other sources such as your doctor.

When resources are limited, BRS is required to provide services to persons with the most significant disabilities. This is called the Order of Selection. If your disabilities are not found to be "significant" you may not be eligible for services. Staff assisting you with the application process can explain this in more detail.

Sometimes it may be necessary for BRS to arrange for tests or other assessments to determine your eligibility or priority under the Order of Selection. These tests would be given at no cost to you. You will be fully informed throughout each step of the process. You are encouraged to be involved in how these assessments are done, including the selection of providers who will perform these evaluations.

BRS assessments may include:

- Collecting information about your history and any records that document your disability;
- Situational assessment/job testing;
- Psychological assessment;
- Medical evaluations;
- Talking with you to determine how your disability may impact employment; and
- Other evaluations that you and your counselor determine are necessary.

Our goal is to determine the status of your eligibility as quickly as possible with the minimum amount of tests and paperwork. The law requires that this process be completed within 60 days. If it takes longer than 60 days due to insufficient information, we will ask you to sign an agreement to extend the period for eligibility determination.



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# How Do I Make a Good Career Choice?

Making a career choice involves matching your abilities, interests, values and personality with the demands of the real world of work. This is an active, ongoing process that includes activities designed to help you pick a job goal. Your BRS counselor is available to help you with this process.

## ***There are Four Steps in Choosing a Career:***

### **1. Know Yourself**

The process begins with you understanding yourself. What motivates you? What are your interests? What do you enjoy doing? What skills do you have? What is your personality like? What disability-related issues impact your career choice? This exploration can be done through a variety of ways, including self-assessment, in-depth counseling interviews with your counselor and pencil tests (such as interest or ability tests) and career groups.

### **2. Gather Occupational and Educational Information**

Because occupational and educational information is always changing, it is important that you gather information about the world of work, and determine where you best fit. If you need assistance, you may discuss this with your counselor. There are a number of resources for career information, such as the Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH), Department of Labor's Americas Job Centers, O\*NET OnLine at [www.onwtonline.org](http://www.onwtonline.org) and the Internet. There are also vocational activities that may help with this step such as visiting a job site and observing people doing the job in which you're interested or trying out the job yourself for a short period of time.

In addition, talking to employers or other people in your field of interest is an excellent way to learn more about the career(s) you are considering. The Career Exploration Form on the following pages can help you gather some of the information that will be important for you to know. Your counselor may also have some of this information from talking to employers. The more job or employment information you can gather, the better your career decision is likely to be. In developing your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), it will be helpful to share any of the information you have gathered with your counselor.

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### **3. Find the Right Career Match**

Once you have gone through a good self-assessment process and completed the occupational information phase, you are ready to make a sound decision to match your skills, abilities, values and personality with the demands of your chosen occupation. Additionally, your counselor can help you evaluate the physical or mental demands required and any potential reasonable accommodations you might need to be successful.

### **4. Plan a Course of Action**

Developing your IPE with a focused employment goal is essential. This plan will detail the services and supports you will need from BRS to help you reach your goal. It will also detail the steps you need to take towards achieving this employment goal. Your BRS counselor is available to help you develop this plan.

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## Notes

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## Career Exploration Notes

*(Questions to ask an employer, employee, human resource officer, friend or family member knowledgeable about the job you are researching.)*

Job Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Employer: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Date: \_\_\_\_\_ By: \_\_\_\_\_

Education/Training Needed: \_\_\_\_\_

What worker traits or skills are needed for this job?

\_\_\_\_\_

What are the main job duties?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

Does the job require:

Sitting

Standing

Walking

Lifting       Light       Medium       Heavy

Job Conditions (check off all that apply):

Indoor       Work mostly alone       Full-time

Outdoor       Work with people       Part-time

Work with things       Temporary

Close supervision       Limited supervision

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How is the job performance evaluated or reviewed? \_\_\_\_\_

Do you ever consider trainees or on-the-job training?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes                      \_\_\_\_\_ No

Starting salary: \$ \_\_\_\_\_/hour

\_\_\_\_\_ Paid vacation

Highest salary: \$ \_\_\_\_\_/hour

\_\_\_\_\_ Paid sick leave

\_\_\_\_\_ Medical Insurance

### Typical Hours

\_\_\_\_\_ Day Shift

\_\_\_\_\_ Afternoon

\_\_\_\_\_ Night

\_\_\_\_\_ Weekend

\_\_\_\_\_ Overtime

Can you recommend other businesses to be contacted about this occupation?

Notes:

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# How Do I Develop an Effective and Meaningful Individualized Plan for Employment?

## What is an Individualized Plan for Employment?

An Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) is a written document that describes how vocational rehabilitation services will help you towards your employment goal. Both you and your counselor will agree to a realistic job goal for you and a plan how you will reach that goal. This plan is developed after analyzing such things as your previous work experience (if any), how your disability impacts your ability to work, and the type of job in which you are interested and could be successful. It outlines how you will achieve employment with the assistance of vocational rehabilitation services. The IPE may be very simple and quick or it may require considerable time and care to develop, based on your particular circumstances. It will take into consideration your unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, interests, and informed choice.

## How or When is the Individualized Plan for Employment Developed?

Once your eligibility to receive vocational rehabilitation services has been determined, you may begin to develop your IPE. The goal and services required in the plan are developed between you and your counselor. It is based on the information that you or others provide regarding your abilities and interests. You are welcome to involve any individuals of your choosing in this process. These may include family, friends, and members of your support network, advocates, or experts outside of BRS.

You can work on your plan development in a number of ways:

- Work on your own or with support from any of the resources noted above. BRS can help you with information or guidance as you request. We will act as your consultant.
- Collaborate with a BRS counselor. You will meet regularly with your counselor who can support and guide you during this selection process.

In addition to information provided in this handbook, BRS has resource information in each office that can help you to develop a meaningful plan. The public library and the Internet are also great sources of information.

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## How Do I Develop an Individualized Plan for Employment That's Right for Me?

There are basically two steps to developing your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE):

1. Decide on an employment goal; and
2. Identify the steps needed to reach that goal. Under the VR program, plans are developed based on your unique needs, with your choices being included as much as possible. Our job is to help you to be informed about your choices. You will need to understand what you want and how alternatives and consequences may impact the decisions you make. There are also some rules that BRS must follow.

BRS has an IPE form that must be completed; your counselor can provide you with a copy of that form. Your preparation to write your plan is even more important. The IPE Worksheet following this section of the handbook can help you with the planning process.

## How Do I Decide on an Employment Goal?

There are many things you need to consider when deciding on an employment goal. First, what work experience and skills do you currently have? What type of job best fits you as a person, taking into consideration such things as your abilities, capabilities, and interests?

Next look at the job itself and consider these questions:

1. Is this a job where there are many opportunities for employment?
2. Where are the potential employers located and will transportation be an issue?
3. What opportunities will there be in the future for you in this field?
4. What will this job pay, and does that meet your needs?
5. Is there flexibility in working conditions?
6. How long will it take to get the skills necessary so that you can achieve this goal?
7. What resources will you need to reach the goal?
8. If the goal will require a lot of preparation time, can you afford to be unemployed for an extended period of time while you prepare for the goal?

Your BRS counselor can help you look for an employment goal that's right for you. He/she has information about different careers, may know other people or activities that can help you to get more information, and can help guide you through the process of making a decision. You may also choose to involve individuals outside of BRS in the development of your employment goal.

For additional information on choosing a job goal, see the section of this book called, ***“How Do I Make a Good Career Choice?”***

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## **How Do I Develop a Plan for Reaching the Goal?**

Your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) will describe the services that you will need in order to reach your goal, the time frames for the goal and services, and the responsibilities of everyone involved in your plan.

The services that are included in this plan should only be those that are necessary to achieve your employment goal. Please consider the following:

1. What will you need to reach the goal?
2. How long will it take you to achieve this goal?
3. What is the most efficient way of getting to the goal, both in terms of time and costs?
4. Who are the potential providers of services, and which one will be best for you?
5. Will you have any problems in accessing the services you need (due to such things as transportation, disability-related issues, etc.)?
6. Are there any BRS rules you need to consider when deciding on a plan for services?

Your BRS counselor can assist you with the process of developing an appropriate IPE. He or she will be able to help you find out what services you may need to reach your goal and can tell you what BRS rules may apply. For most services, the counselor will have information regarding who can provide the services you need. BRS encourages you to talk with the service providers and get more information from them before deciding which one to choose. You may also choose to involve any individuals or sources outside of BRS in the development of your IPE.

Once you and your counselor have agreed on your job goal and the services you require to achieve that goal, your plan can be written and services may begin.

## **How Will BRS Decide Whether or Not to Approve My Plan?**

BRS will look at a number of factors in deciding whether or not to approve your IPE.

The following checklist includes the major points of consideration:

- Is the plan consistent with your strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice?
- Are the services requested essential toward reaching your goal?
- Does the plan have measurable goals to be monitored to ensure a successful outcome?
- Are the time frames realistic toward reaching your goal?



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- Have other sources of funding been explored, when appropriate?
  - Are the sources of payment identified in the plan?
  - Is the cost of the service reasonable?
  - Are treatments or interventions that you need to be successful addressed in the plan?
  - Are the services consistent with BRS regulations and policies?

### **What Happens If I Want to Change My Plan or If I Need More Services?**

It is important that you contact your counselor immediately to discuss any changes in your plan. When changes are agreed upon, an amendment to the IPE will be written.

You and your counselor will review and update your plan at least once a year even if there are no major changes.

### **What If I Have Questions or Concerns About My IPE?**

**Your counselor is the key person you can go to for answers about your IPE.**

Services are provided based on individual needs. If your counselor cannot answer your questions to your satisfaction, you should ask to speak to a BRS supervisor. If you still have questions or you disagree with BRS, there are other procedures that may help. For more information about this, see page 26 of this book called, **“What Do I Do If I Disagree With BRS?”**

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## Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) Worksheet

(May be completed by consumer or BRS counselor to help determine details of your IPE.)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Person completing this form (if other than consumer): \_\_\_\_\_

### EMPLOYMENT OUTCOME/JOB GOAL

What is the specific job goal you plan to achieve? \_\_\_\_\_

What are your reasons for choosing this goal?

Why is this a good choice for you, given your strengths, abilities, resources, interests and priorities? Describe any available evidence to show that this is a good choice.

What is the job market for this goal? How did you learn about the current job market?

### Qualifications To Achieve The Job Goal

What qualifications do you currently have for the job goal?

What qualifications do you need to develop further in order to reach this goal?

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## **Intermediate Steps/Objectives**

Please list any steps that must be accomplished before you can reach your job goal.

How will your progress toward achieving these steps be evaluated?

## **Concerns And Barriers To Achieving The Job Goal**

List any concerns, barriers, or problems that must be resolved before you will be able to go to work (for example, understanding the impact of work on Social Security or other benefits, finding transportation or child care, getting job accommodations, or other issues about your disability).

Describe services that you will need in order to resolve these concerns, barriers, or problems.

## **Resources To Pay For Services Needed**

What are you able and willing to contribute to the cost of any services needed for your IPE?

What other resources may be helpful in paying for the services that you need? Describe the availability of these resources.

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## Who Will Pay for the Services I Need?

Every Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) is different. It describes the employment goal, the services needed to reach that goal, and the agreement between you and BRS. Many resources may be used to cover the costs of services under the IPE, including your resources, your family, your insurance or benefits, other public programs and/or BRS. Each IPE should carefully spell out who is responsible to pay for what services.

- You will be asked to voluntarily contribute resources toward the cost of your IPE. Examples of how you might contribute resources include paying a vendor for a portion of the cost of the services you need or getting some of the services on your own. BRS strongly believes that the personal investment of each individual is an important ingredient in making the IPE meaningful and successful. You are not, however, required to provide a contribution and your plan cannot be held up if you are not able to contribute.
- Before BRS funds can be used, it is required by law to determine if there are other resources (such as other agencies, your health insurance, financial aid for post-secondary education, or employee benefits) that will pay for the services you need. You may be required to apply for these other resources. BRS will also use any other resources that are readily available toward the costs of your IPE.
- BRS may pay for services or goods that are not available from other sources and that are agreed upon in your IPE. These goods and services must be purchased in a way that agrees with state and BRS purchasing policies and terms. BRS is only able to use service providers who agree with these policies and terms.

If you have any questions about who is paying for services identified in your IPE, please ask your counselor. It is important that you know who is paying and what the costs are for services and goods in your IPE. This knowledge will help you make better decisions about the services that you receive.

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## What Will Happen to My Benefits If I Go to Work?

If you receive disability cash or medical benefits (such as Social Security Disability Insurance, Supplemental Security Income, State Supplement, Medicare and/or Medicaid), you may qualify under rules that would allow you to work and still receive benefits. It is important that you get accurate information, so that you can make good decisions about your vocational goals, your potential earnings and your health insurance needs.

You will need to report your earnings to Social Security if you receive a benefit from them. If you have a state benefit like Medicaid or State Supplement, you need to report your earnings to the Department of Social Services. If you receive benefits from both of these programs, you will need to report your earnings to both.

### Work Incentives

Social Security has work incentives that may allow you to work and still receive benefits.

If you receive **Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)** benefits:

- You can work for a trial period and still receive your benefits. After that trial period is over, Social Security will decide if your level of earnings allows you to keep receiving benefits or if benefits should stop.
- There are situations where you can earn over \$1,090 gross per month (2015) after your trial work period and continue to receive your full SSDI monthly benefit amount.
- SSDI cash benefits can be reactivated for an extended period of time if earnings fall below \$1,090 per month.
- Medicare can continue for an extended period of time even if SSDI cash benefits have stopped.

If you receive **Supplemental Security Income (SSI)**:

- When you work, your check will be reduced gradually, depending on your earnings. Social Security counts less than half of your earnings when figuring how much SSI you would receive.

If you have a disability and receive **Medicaid (Title XIX)**:

- For SSI or State Supplement recipients, your cash benefits may stop due to earnings. In most cases, you can continue to be insured by Medicaid until you earn \$65,144 per year or \$5,428.66 per month (*limit for 2015*) without paying any premium for Medicaid coverage.

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- If you work and have a disability, and your income goes over \$65,144 per year or \$5,428.66 per month (*limit for 2015*), you may be eligible for **MED-CONNECT**. With MED-CONNECT, you may have income up to \$75,000 per year (not counting spousal income), and have \$10,000 in liquid assets (\$15,000 if married) and retirement accounts. You may have to pay a monthly premium, based on your annual income (and your spouse's income, if you are married).
  - If you are receiving SSDI, you may be eligible for MED-CONNECT. The income and asset limits are the same as the ones described above. The Department of Social Services (DSS) usually calls this SO5.
  - If Social Security determines that your disability has improved but is chronic, you may be able to keep your MED-CONNECT benefits as long as you continue to work.
  - Even if you are not receiving Social Security Benefits, you may be able to obtain MED-CONNECT if you meet Social Security's disability standards. The Department of Social Services can have your disability evaluated to determine your eligibility in this situation.

### **How Do I Get the Information That I Need on Benefits So That I Can Make Good Vocational Choices?**

- A Benefits Specialist (also known as a CommunityWork Incentive Coordinator or CWIC) at BRS understands how work and earnings will affect your benefits.
- Please see information below on how to contact a Benefits Specialist in your area. Simple questions can be answered by phone. You will probably need to meet with a Benefits Specialist if you have a number of questions or a complicated situation.
- Ask for fact sheets on Social Security Disability Insurance, Supplemental Security Income and State Supplement as well as a brochure on MED-CONNECT that are available at all BRS offices.
- Request information and assistance concerning your benefits from other reliable programs or agencies that you know will give accurate information.

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## Finding A Benefits Counselor

### Local Contacts

Please call the office closest to where you live and ask to be connected with the Benefits Specialist:

Greater Hartford and Willimantic: 860-723-1400;

Greater New Britain and Meriden 860-612-3569;

Greater New Haven and Middletown 203-974-3000;

Greater New London and Norwich 860-439-7686;

Fairfield County and Danbury 203-551-5500;

Greater Waterbury and Torrington 203-578-4550.

Spanish-speaking Benefits Specialists are available.

### Connect-to-Work Project Director

You may contact the Director in the BRS Central Office: Joyce Armstrong, 860-424-4849 or toll free at 1-800-773-4636 or e-mail: [joyce.armstrong@ct.gov](mailto:joyce.armstrong@ct.gov).

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## What Can I Do to Make the BRS Program Work for Me?

While going through the BRS program may take time or may be confusing, there are steps you can take to make it easier. You and your BRS counselor are partners and your active participation will help to speed up the process to achieve your goal more quickly. Here is a list of suggestions to help make the process successful:

- ***Think about your employment plans*** prior to meeting with your BRS counselor. Carefully think about your likes, dislikes, strengths and weaknesses. Consider long-term career goals and how you can achieve them. Having ideas to discuss with your counselor can help you get to know each other. Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs) that are thoroughly developed are more likely to succeed.
- ***Take responsibility for your program.*** You determine your future. Your counselor is there to assist and guide you, but there will be things you need to accomplish for yourself.
- When possible, ***keep scheduled appointments.*** Missing appointments may delay your progress. If you must cancel, call ahead of time to reschedule.
- ***Ask if you should bring anything to your appointments.*** When possible, obtain medical or educational records that will be needed by BRS. Your counselor will tell you what is necessary to determine your eligibility or to do employment planning.
- ***Record important information*** or ask that it be put in writing for you. Keep your own BRS file with all the papers you receive.
- ***Plan ahead*** when making vocational or educational plans. You may be disappointed if you wait until the last minute before applying for services or contacting your counselor.



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- ***Keep in touch with your counselor.*** You can call your counselor at any time; you don't have to wait for your counselor to call you. If the counselor is not available, leave your name and how you can be reached.
  
  - ***Be aware of any communications from BRS.*** BRS may contact you about your application or on-going case by phone, e-mail, or United States Postal Service. Respond to phone calls and e-mails. Read all mail that BRS sends to you. BRS may send you a document for your records; notify you of a change in your case or your status as a consumer; or invite you to attend special events like the BRS Public Meeting or Hiring Events. Contact your counselor as soon as possible if you don't understand any communications sent to you.
  
  - ***Ask questions when you are unsure about information or the process.*** The BRS program may be confusing and your counselor can provide answers. For additional advice or assistance, you may call the **Client Assistance Program (CAP)** at 1-800-842-7303.
  
  - ***Share your views*** with the **State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)**, a group of consumers, family members, service providers and advocates who are appointed by the Governor to assess, advise and recommend policy for BRS regarding the effectiveness of the vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs. You may attend one of the Council's bi-monthly meetings or the BRS public meeting. Announcements about BRS public meetings will be mailed to you or you may ask your counselor when the next public meeting will be held. See more details about the SRC in the next section. If you would like to attend a meeting or volunteer to participate, contact your counselor or call the BRS toll-free line at 1-800-537-2549 and ask for the Liaison to the SRC.

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## What is the SRC?

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is an important partner with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS). The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, mandates how employment services for people with disabilities are administered through the Title I - Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Title VI - Supported Employment programs. This act requires each designated state unit (*BRS in Connecticut*) to work closely with its SRC in conducting needs assessments and evaluations and in developing the State Plan, strategic plans, reports, and state goals and priorities.

### **Mission**

The SRC provides assessment, advice and recommendations to BRS and others regarding coordination and effectiveness of programs and strategies which promote community-based competitive employment for persons with disabilities.

### **Goals**

The SRC will:

- ◆ assess the effectiveness and delivery of vocational services provided by BRS to individuals with disabilities;
- ◆ strive to improve the coordination of vocational services among BRS, the state agencies and public and private entities for the benefit of consumers of BRS.
- ◆ make recommendations to the Governor, BRS and others for developing and improving strategies for the employment and vocational services for individuals with disabilities.

### **Membership**

The SRC is comprised of a variety of people including consumers, family members, advocates, business leaders, community representatives, and professionals who support BRS employment endeavors. A majority of the members have a disability. These Governor-appointed SRC members serve as the voice of consumers to assist BRS to plan and implement VR services. Any individual willing to serve in this capacity may seek an appointment to become a part of the SRC. Members are appointed to a three-year term following an application process; they may be appointed to a second three-year term.

Per the Rehab Act, the SRC needs to have specific representatives of the following groups:

- ◆ at least one representative of
  1. **the Statewide Independent Living Council,**
  2. **the Parent Training and Information Center,**
  3. **the Client Assistance Program - CAP (Section 112),**

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4. a qualified vocational rehabilitation counselor,
  5. Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP),
  6. the State Education Department,
  7. the State Workforce Investment Board, and
  8. Section 121 (VR for native Americans);

- ◆ four representatives of **business, industry and labor**;
- ◆ representatives of **disability advocacy groups representing physical, cognitive, sensory, and mental disabilities and individuals who have difficulty representing themselves**; and
- ◆ current or former **applicants or recipients of VR services** .

## **Meetings**

The SRC rotates meetings around the state six times per year. Members are provided with accommodations for meetings and are reimbursed for travel expenses to and from meetings and other SRC activities. When needed, expenses for the use of personal care assistants that enable member participation in the meetings may also be reimbursed.

Members are asked to join at least one subcommittee that will meet as needed to achieve committee goals. Members conduct their work through the following standing subcommittees: Business Partnership; Consumer Satisfaction; Inter-council Coordination/ Nominations; and Legislation, Policy, and Planning. **SRC members are also required to attend at least one public meeting per year and are invited to the BRS Annual Meeting.** They may attend other BRS activities or programs as they become available.

## **Recruitment of New Members**

**The SRC always seeks new members who have a strong interest in the VR program and/or employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Having the time and willingness to do the work is essential.** If you are interested in becoming a member, ask your counselor or contact the SRC Liaison listed below.

**Evelyn Oliver Knight, SRC Liaison:**

**860-424-4871 (direct line);**

**1-800-537-2549 (toll-free);**

**860-920-7163 (Video Phone);**

**860-424-4850 (Fax);**

**[evelyn.knight@ct.gov](mailto:evelyn.knight@ct.gov) (E-mail);**

**[www.ct.gov/brs](http://www.ct.gov/brs) (Web Site).**

## What Happens If I Disagree With BRS?

You will work with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) counselor assigned to help you achieve the goals defined in your Individualized Plan of Employment (IPE). If you disagree with a decision your counselor makes about how to achieve these goals, you have several options to solve the problem.

### General Discussions

BRS encourages you to try to work out problems through general discussions with the BRS staff whenever possible. If you and your counselor are unable to agree on the solution, you may ask your counselor to bring in a supervisor, a district director, or a central office staff person who may provide information to help solve the issue.

### Formal Options

If you are not able to resolve a problem through general discussions, you have the right to request a more formal solution to any disagreement about services or disagreement with any decision made by BRS. **You may request any of the following formal options whenever general discussions do not solve the issue:**

- ◆ **an Informal Review;**
- ◆ **Mediation; or**
- ◆ **an Administrative Hearing.**

BRS must first tell you in writing when a decision has been made regarding your case. If you want to change a decision, you will have to ask BRS in writing (or form of communication appropriate to your disability needs) to change it. **You must be specific in this request to state the decision BRS made that you want to have reviewed or overturned.**

At all meetings for the Informal Review, the Mediation, or the Administrative Hearing, you may:

- ◆ Explain why you believe BRS should change the decision that was made.
- ◆ Present additional information (evidence) to support your request.

(Evidence may include, but is not limited to, reports from your doctor or grade reports from your training program.)

- ◆ Ask a lawyer, an advocate, your relative or other spokesperson to represent you. If there is a cost for this representation, you will be responsible for paying this bill. You may also contact the Client Assistance Program (CAP) to ask them to represent you. *(See CAP information at the end of this section).*

All meetings for the Informal Review, the Mediation, or the Administrative Hearing will be held in the BRS office where you receive services, or at an accessible location during BRS work hours, or at a time and place that is agreeable to you and BRS.

You and/or your representative will have access to information in your case file. However, medical, psychological or other information that BRS decides may be harmful to you cannot be released directly to you, but must be given to your designated representative.

**All decisions for the Informal Review, the Mediation, or the Administrative Hearing will be based on the requirements in:**

- ◆ The State Plan for BRS;
- ◆ The Federal Rehabilitation Act and federal regulations; and
- ◆ State statutes, regulations, and policies that control BRS.

The State Plan for BRS and the Policy Manual are available on the BRS Website. You are welcome to review these documents at any time at <http://ct.gov/dors>; please select the BRS section in the middle of the home page and look for Publications. You will be given copies of or references to other guidelines.

BRS cannot suspend, reduce, or end services you are receiving until the person who is conducting the Informal Review, the Mediation, or the Administrative Hearing makes a decision. However, BRS will suspend, reduce, or end services before this decision has been made **at your request**, or if you obtained these services through misrepresentation, fraud, collusion, or criminal conduct by you or your representative.

**If you do not appear at the scheduled Informal Review, Mediation, or Administrative Hearing, the person hearing the appeal may consider the matter closed. If there is a valid reason for your absence, you have 10 days to inform BRS of the reason you missed the review. The reviewer will then decide if your appeal may be rescheduled.**

### **What is an Informal Review?**

In the Informal Review, you and your counselor will meet with a **district director** who will provide a decision regarding your case.

### **What you Should Know about an Informal Review:**

- ◆ You must send a written request (or form of communication appropriate to your disability needs) for the review to the **district director of the regional BRS office** where you receive services.
- ◆ **BRS must receive this request within 30 days** after the date that BRS notifies you of the decision with which you disagree.
- ◆ The Informal Review will be scheduled in a timely manner (usually within two-three weeks). A staff person will contact you to arrange this date.
- ◆ At the review, you will have to explain why you believe the decision that BRS made is incorrect and should be changed.
- ◆ The district director hearing the review will make a decision within a reasonable time.
- ◆ If you disagree with the Informal Review decision, you may still request Mediation or an Administrative Hearing.

### **What is Mediation?**

Mediation is a process used to reach an agreement or compromise when two parties disagree. If you request mediation, **it will only happen if BRS agrees to enter into the mediation process with you.** Mediation is voluntary for you and BRS.

You and BRS will agree on the selection of the mediator, a neutral person to listen

to both sides, from a list of mediators maintained by BRS. The mediator meets with you and BRS to reach a written compromise that will settle the disagreement.

Mediation is very different from an Informal Review or Administrative Hearing with BRS. The mediator does not make a decision for you and BRS to follow. In this process, you and BRS develop an agreement together with the help of the mediator. You and BRS must sign this written agreement.

### **What You Should Know about Mediation:**

- ◆ You must send a written request (or form of communication appropriate to your disability needs) for Mediation to the district director of the Regional BRS office where you receive services.
- ◆ **BRS must receive this request within 30 days** after the date that BRS notifies you of the decision with which you disagree, or within 30 days of the mailing of the Informal Review decision, whichever is later.
- ◆ **BRS may deny the request for mediation in cases where it is not likely that mediation will settle the disagreement.** In such cases, you may still request an Administrative Hearing.
- ◆ If BRS agrees to the Mediation, it will be scheduled in a timely manner.
- ◆ You should be prepared to compromise with BRS.
- ◆ The mediator will separate you and BRS into two different rooms so that you both may present your information. The mediator will speak for you when meeting with BRS. The mediator will share the BRS response with you.
- ◆ If the mediator is able to reach a compromise between you and BRS, the compromise will be written in a mediation agreement; both you and BRS will receive a copy of the agreement.
- ◆ The written agreement may not include exactly what you want. It will, however, list steps that will help you and BRS reach a solution to your disagreement.
- ◆ Mediation discussions are confidential and may not be used as evidence in a later hearing or litigation.
- ◆ BRS is not bound by the terms in the mediation agreement **if you later appeal the resolved issues in an Administrative Hearing or court.**

- ◆ At any point in the mediation process, you, BRS, or the mediator may elect to stop the mediation. If this occurs, you may pursue an Administrative Hearing.
- ◆ Mediation is completed by a signed agreement or termination of mediation. When there is no agreement or a formal termination, the mediation is completed at the end of the last mediation meeting.
- ◆ If you disagree with the Mediation agreement, you may still request an Administrative Hearing.

### **What is an Administrative Hearing?**

An Administrative Hearing is a formal, legal procedure. A court reporter will attend to keep an official record of the hearing. An **impartial hearing officer** will run the hearing and make a decision. **A lawyer from the Attorney General's Office of the State of Connecticut will represent BRS at the Administrative Hearing.**

### **What You Should Know about an Administrative Hearing:**

- ◆ You must send a written request (or form of communication appropriate to your disability needs) for an administrative hearing to the **BRS director** at the BRS central office in Hartford.
- ◆ **BRS must receive this request within 30 days after the date that BRS notifies you of the decision with which you disagree, or within 30 days of the mailing of the Informal Review decision, or completion of mediation.**
- ◆ **BRS must schedule the Administrative Hearing within 60 days of your request to review a BRS decision, unless you and BRS agree to a later date.** Staff in the BRS central office will contact you to schedule the Administrative Hearing and send you written notification including the date, time and place.
- ◆ You may bring legal representation or an advocate. Some consumers have felt overwhelmed during this legal proceeding without someone to support or represent them.
- ◆ You should be prepared to present evidence and information to support your



disagreement with BRS.

- ◆ The hearing officer will write an **official decision** that includes a full report of the findings and the reasons for the decision to you (your representative, if you have one) and to the director of BRS **within 30 calendar days of the Administrative Hearing**.
- ◆ If you disagree with an Administrative Hearing decision, you may then request **the Commissioner of the agency to review the decision**.

### **What is the Commissioner Review of the Administrative Hearing?**

If you or BRS is not satisfied with the Administrative Hearing decision, you or BRS may ask the Commissioner of the Department of Rehabilitation Services to review the decision the impartial hearing officer makes. **The Commissioner Review only applies to the Administrative Hearing decision.**

### **What You Should Know about the Commissioner Review of the Administrative Hearing:**

- ◆ You must send a written request (or form of communication appropriate to your disability needs) for the Commissioner Review of the Administrative Hearing to the **commissioner of the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)** at the central office in Hartford.
- ◆ The commissioner must receive the request for this review **within 20 days** after the mailing of the impartial hearing officer's decision.
- ◆ The commissioner will review the decision of the hearing officer to determine if:
  - ❖ the decision is arbitrary (illogical), capricious (unreliable), an abuse of discretion, or is otherwise unreasonable;
  - ❖ the decision is supported by substantial evidence, consistent with facts and applicable federal and state policy and law; and
  - ❖ statutes and law; the State Plan; the Policy Manual; testimony; state agency options in the delivery of services; and federal policy as related to the issues in question have been given appropriate and adequate interpretations.
- ◆ The commissioner will make a decision within a reasonable time.
- ◆ You may appeal the Commissioner's decision (or the Hearing Officer's

decision if the Commissioner does not review the decision) to the state or federal court. This would be the final appeal regarding the BRS decision. If you file an appeal in civil court, you may want to seek assistance from CAP.

### **What Is CAP?**

The **Client Assistance Program (CAP)** is part of the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities. CAP provides information, advice, advocacy and, if necessary, legal representation to persons who have concerns about the rehabilitation services they receive from BRS. The CAP advocate may be able to help you resolve issues directly with BRS, such as meeting with you and your BRS counselor, or they can help you in the more formal processes discussed above. CAP is located at 60-B Weston Street, Hartford, CT; the phone number is (860) 297-4300 or 1-800-842-7303. All advice and discussions with CAP are confidential and will not affect your services in a negative way.

You may also contact Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut at [www.slscct.org](http://www.slscct.org) or call 1-800-453-3320 (1-860-344-0380 in Middletown and Hartford areas).

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# Job Placement Services

## What Are Job Placement Services?

When you and your counselor decide that you are ready, your counselor will work with you to find a job or arrange for other services, if they are necessary to help you get a job.

Looking for work requires a full-time effort. To be successful in finding the job you want, it will be important for you to do your part. The more job-hunting you do, the better your chances of finding work. Be sure to ask family and friends if they know of any job openings, contact the nearest Department of Labor's Americas Job Center, and check the "Help Wanted" section of the newspaper and Internet.

There are a number of services that BRS may provide to assist you with placement, depending on your needs. These services may be provided directly by BRS staff or through other agencies.

- **Interview Preparedness Training** - This training assists with interviewing skills, resume writing and application techniques to help you prepare for your job search. Interview preparedness training may be individual assistance or provided as part of a class.
- **Individual Placement Assistance** - Your counselor or another agency may help you identify local employers who might have job openings in your area of interest or advise you on interviewing and resume writing. If needed, arrangements can be made for someone to accompany you to interviews.
- **Job Clubs** - Job clubs are group sessions which provide information on current local job openings, follow-up with employers and ongoing support.

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- **Work Evaluation** - A work evaluation is an opportunity for you to try out a real job to determine if you are suited to a particular type of work. A trained evaluator will go with you to assist you in understanding the job and to observe your performance. The assessment usually lasts no more than 40 hours.

### **Can BRS Continue to Provide Assistance after I'm Working?**

- Your BRS counselor will maintain contact with you during your first 90 days on the job or longer, if necessary, to make sure your job is satisfactory. With your permission, your counselor may contact your supervisor to discuss your progress on the job.
- BRS can provide technical assistance to you and your employer to identify ways to modify the job site so you can perform better. This may include special equipment or rearranging the work site.
- BRS can provide post-employment services that assist you in retaining the job or finding another job in the same or related field. Usually these services are offered if you have a problem, caused by your disability, that affects your work.

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# Work Evaluation

## **What Is a Work Evaluation?**

A work evaluation is an opportunity for you to try one or more real jobs, to see how those jobs match your interests and availability of job opportunities. The choice of jobs will be based on your interests, abilities, and needs. Evaluations may vary in length, depending on your particular situation. You may be paid for the work you do during the evaluation, usually at the minimum wage.

Most of the time during this assessment, an evaluator will be with you, to see how you do on the job. He or she will look at many aspects of your job performance, such as your work skills, behaviors, relationships with the boss and co-workers, attendance, and work tolerance. From the experience, you will have the chance to see how you like the job and how well you perform the duties. Sometimes, a work evaluation may be set up with an employer who has a job opening, and if they are satisfied with your work, you may be offered a job. After the evaluation is finished, you and your counselor will get a report from the evaluator explaining how you did, whether the job seems suitable for you, and whether you will need other services to be successful.

## **What Is Important for Me to Know and Do?**

When it is agreed that you need a work evaluation, your counselor can help you select a community agency who can set up an evaluation that will best meet your needs. Before this assessment begins, you need to be involved with the decision about the type of job you will do during the evaluation. It is important that you let your BRS counselor and the evaluator know about anything that will help them find the right place to do the work evaluation. You need to let them know about your interests and abilities, as well as any concerns or preferences you may have about your work schedule, transportation, pay requirements, government benefits you may receive, disability-related needs, work environment, location of the job, or any other information that will help in finding an evaluation site that will best suit you. If you know of particular places you would like to work, share this with your counselor.

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Before and during the evaluation, it is important for you to understand what is expected of you. Good attendance at planning meetings and at work, arriving on time, proper clothing and getting along with the boss and co-workers will always be important. In addition, the particular job where you are assessed will probably have other requirements that you will need to know.

Finally, it is important for you to ask any questions that you may have and to provide feedback during the process.

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# Job Coaching and Supported Employment

## What Is Job Coaching?

A job coach is a person who provides support you may need to keep a job. Everyone may not need a job coach. If you do, you may need a job coach only for a limited period of time or you may need support from a job coach on an ongoing basis (which BRS calls “supported employment”).

A job coach may provide the following services:

- help your employer train you on the skills needed for the job;
- help you work with supervisors and co-workers;
- help you learn how to use transportation for going to work;
- help you to know what is expected of you on the job; and
- assistance if the work becomes too difficult for you or other problems arise that affect your work.

Sometimes the job coach may work with your employer to teach him/her how to provide support to you. A job coach will usually meet with you at work, but may meet with you off the job, if that is appropriate and more comfortable for you.

## What Is Supported Employment?

Supported employment is a regular job in the community with the supports (usually job coaching) to help you keep the job. It is designed for persons who, because of a significant disability, are expected to need supports for as long as they remain employed. The amount of support you would receive on a daily or weekly basis will depend on your particular needs.

BRS is able to provide these services only on a time-limited basis. Because people who are in supported employment will need long-term supports, plans must be made for who will provide the job coaching or other supports after BRS services are finished. In fact, the law requires that these plans be made *before* someone starts in supported employment. Therefore, it is very important that you work with your counselor to apply for other services that may be available to provide the ongoing support after the BRS services are completed. Examples of resources that may be available to provide these ongoing supports are the Department of Developmental Services, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services,

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Employment Opportunities Program (EOP), Social Security Impairment-Related Work Expenses (IR WE), natural supports from an employer and family support.

### **What Else Is Important for Me to Know?**

Job coaching and supported employment should be designed to meet your individual needs for keeping your job. The way BRS can set up job coaching is quite flexible. Some people may need more or different kinds of support than others. Some people work better with certain job coaches than others (for example, you may feel much more comfortable working with a female or male job coach). It is important that you let your BRS counselor know if you have specific needs in the amount or type of services that you receive. If you have any problems or concerns in working with your job coach, you should inform the BRS counselor.



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## Self-Employment Services

### What Is Self-Employment?

Self-employment is a type of work where you own and operate your own business. It may be a business that you operate out of your home. It may also be called a small business enterprise or a micro-business enterprise.

### Do I Qualify for Self-Employment Services?

If your employment goal is to be self-employed or to establish a small business enterprise, BRS may be able to assist you with establishing or maintaining the business.

In general, setting up your own business will require a significant commitment of your time and resources to be a success. The Bureau may be able to help you in the development of self-employment or a small business enterprise under the following conditions:

- You must develop a business plan, and it must be approved by the Connecticut Small Business Development Center (CSBDC) as an economically viable proposal. An alternate small business resource acceptable to both you and your counselor may be used instead of the CSBDC.
- Prior to providing services under an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) with a goal of self-employment, the Bureau must agree to both the goal and the business plan. It will be important for you and your counselor to discuss how you will decide what defines a successful business.
- The Bureau generally limits its contribution toward establishing a small business (excluding training costs and disability-related vehicle and/or work site modifications) to \$10,000 for businesses that are expected to have a net income at or above the amount recognized by the Social Security Administration as

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**substantial gainful activity (SGA)** after two years in operation. For those businesses that are expected to have a lower income, the limit is \$5,000. **Check with your counselor to verify the SGA amount as it may vary each year .**

- You will be required to make a contribution toward the business, valued at 10% of the Bureau's assistance. Your contribution may be in cash, in-kind labor, and/or materials.
- Self-employment services provided by BRS are limited to start-up services and goods. Examples of start-up services might include business consultants, bookkeeping, advertising, initial stock, insurance, permits, fees, equipment, supplies, rent, utilities, transportation, telephone and postage.

Once the small business enterprise is operating:

- Your counselor will visit the business site and/or be in contact with you to see how the business is going. Before BRS closes your case with the agency, you and your counselor will need to decide whether you still agree that the business is or will be successful.
- If you need additional assistance with your business, the Small Business Development Counseling Center offers ongoing counseling and workshops. *For more information, call toll free: 855-428-7232 or go to [www.ctsbdc.org](http://www.ctsbdc.org).*

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# Post-Employment Services

## What Are Post-Employment Services?

Post-employment services may be provided to you after your case has been closed to help you retain or advance in your current job, or find another job in the same or related field. Usually services are offered if you have a problem related to your disability that affects your work.

## When Am I Eligible for Post-Employment Services?

If you have received services from BRS and your case has been closed recently because you were working, you might be eligible. If you find you are having trouble with your job, are unable to advance in your job, or have lost your job, and you think it is because of your disability, you should contact your BRS counselor to inquire about post-employment services.

## Will I Have to Go Through Exams or Tests Again?

In general, you will not have to redo exams or tests if you are being considered for post-employment services. You are still considered eligible to receive services from BRS based on the information already in your case record. That information can usually be used to determine what services you need.

However, if your disability has changed, or if your circumstances and job goals have significantly changed, you may need to reapply for services. At that time, additional exams or tests may be necessary.

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# Employment Training

## What Is Employment Training?

Employment Training is the means by which a person learns the skills needed to do a particular job or type of work. Examples include:

- work evaluations;
- on-the-job training;
- short-term specific skill training;
- internships;
- volunteer work;
- vocational/technical school; and
- college training.

## Can BRS Help with Employment Training?

BRS may help, if training is needed for you to achieve the job goal, and if BRS has agreed to help you with this as part of your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). The type of training BRS will support depends on your abilities and interests, information about the job market and research on how most people start the kind of work you want to do.

## What Is Expected of Me?

1. You and your counselor must agree on your employment goal and whether training is needed to achieve it.
2. You need to be accepted for admission into the training program or school you will attend.
3. If you are applying to a college or other post-secondary institution, you must apply for financial aid and follow the school's procedures and timetables. Please go to the section entitled "***Financial Aid for Post-Secondary Education***" in this booklet for further details.

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4. You need to advise BRS of any disability-related needs that you will have in attending the program.
  5. You must maintain the performance requirements of the school or program to remain in good standing.
  6. You need to discuss any significant changes with your BRS counselor *beforehand* as your IPE may need to be revised.
  7. You must provide BRS with copies of your grades or progress reports.

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# Financial Aid for Post-Secondary Education

## Why Apply for Financial Aid?

In order for BRS to determine any possible financial contribution to your post secondary training, you must apply for financial aid. By law, BRS may not contribute its funds toward your program until other available resources, as identified by the financial aid office of your school, are applied.

## What Are the Steps in Applying?

1. Check with the financial aid office (FAO) of the school to which you are applying, to find out what the procedure is for that school. **Make sure that you submit your financial aid forms by the deadline of your FAO.**
  - A. **New Students:** Obtain and complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and mail it to the Federal Student Aid Center. The FAFSA can be completed on line at [www.fafsa.ed.gov/](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/). The FAFSA should be available from your high school guidance office, or your college financial aid office.
  - B. **Continuing Students:** You should receive a FAFSA renewal form each year directly from the Federal Student Aid Center in December or early January. Fill it out and return it as quickly as possible. If you do not receive the update form by mid-January, contact your school's FAO.
  - C. Fill out and submit any other forms required by the school's FAO.
2. In about four weeks, you will receive your Student Aid Report (SAR) from the Federal Student Aid Center. If any errors are noted, consult with the school FAO before returning the corrected version to the center.
3. Fill out the student section of the SAR and submit it to the school FAO and meet with the financial aid officer or one of the assistants. Let them know about any special circumstances, costs, or needs you may have. Also, let the financial aid

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officer know that you are a consumer with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) and that they can expect to receive a BRS Client-Student Financial Information Exchange Form (VR-21) from your counselor.

*The VR-21 is the form used by BRS and the F AO to share information to determine the amount of your school expenses and your resources. Any amount of financial assistance provided by the Bureau will be based on the information included on this form. Your BRS counselor will ask you to sign the form at the time that you mutually agree upon an employment plan that requires post-secondary training. You must sign a new VR-21 each year that you are in school or if you change schools.*

4. The FAO officer will review all data received and send you an award letter. Review all figures, including the amount of your student/family contribution. If you do not agree with the figures, contact the FAO for reconsideration. Note that BRS does not require that you take out student loans to be considered for financial sponsorship, even when the FAO identifies them as part of your financial package. However, if you have defaulted on a prior student loan, this may affect your award and BRS sponsorship. You should discuss defaulted student loans with the FAO officer and your BRS counselor as soon as possible.
5. Your completed VR-21 is mailed to the BRS counselor by the FAO.
6. Generally, the contribution that BRS will offer toward education expenses will be limited to no more than the costs of attending a commensurate program in the State Community College system (SCC). For those in baccalaureate programs, that limit will generally apply for the first two years unless the SCC cannot offer full time transferable pre-requisites. In such cases, once the SCC can no longer offer commensurate training the contribution that BRS will offer toward general education expenses will be no greater than the cost of attending a commensurate program in the State University System.
7. The BRS counselor will meet with you to discuss your award package and how BRS may assist in helping to meet the costs of attending school. If you do not agree with the need and resource figures as presented on the VR-21, you may

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request a review of the BRS contribution. If you have evidence that you (or your family) are unable to meet the student/family contribution, you should bring this to the attention of your counselor.

8. Disability-related expenses are looked at separately from general educational expenses. It will be helpful if you can identify as much as possible, whatever disability-related services you will need and their estimated costs. BRS will not require you to apply the family or student contribution identified by the FAO to separate disability-related educational expenses.

### **What Can I Do to Help Make this Process Work?**

1. Keep copies of all forms and correspondence related to your financial aid application.
2. It is your responsibility to meet the deadlines established by the school for financial aid. If you miss the deadline because of your inaction, BRS may not be responsible for assisting you with schooling costs.
3. If you have any questions, call your BRS counselor immediately.

*For further information about the federal student financial aid program, you may contact the Federal Student Aid Information Center, U.S. Department of Education at 1-800-433-3243.*



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## On-the-Job Training

### **Can BRS Help Me to Find a Job Where I Can Also Learn a Skill or a Trade?**

Yes, if training is necessary for you to achieve the job goal that you and your counselor have agreed to in your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), BRS will assist you to obtain the skills you require to be successful in employment. An alternative to formal classroom training is to learn the skills you need while working at the job you desire. This is called on-the-job training (OJT). You and your counselor will need to fully discuss the pros and cons of you learning the required skills in this manner

### **How Do I Know If an OJT Will Work For Me?**

Once a job goal has been agreed upon and it is determined that you require training to obtain the skills you need to be successful in that job, you and your counselor will begin the discussion of how you can best learn the skills. If your job goal is one that does not require formal education, you and your counselor can explore the possibility of developing an on-the-job training site.

### **How Does an OJT Work?**

It is not always easy to find an employer who is willing to train workers on the job. Therefore, locating a job site may take considerable effort by you, your counselor, and/or other job development professionals.

Once it is agreed that this employer can offer you the skills you need to be successful at your job goal, a written contract will be developed between you, the employer, and BRS. Included in this contract will be the hourly wages you will receive from the employer, the hours of training you will receive, and the length of time it will take for you to obtain entry-level skills. In an OJT, BRS could reimburse the employer for the following: the time he/she spends with you to teach you the job; your wages during the contract period; or a combination of both.

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## Transition from School to Work

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services can help eligible students to prepare for and obtain a job.

### What Can BRS Do While I Am Still in High School?

BRS can help with your transition out of high school. We prefer to work with you in your next to last year of school, but in some cases, we can start as early as age 14. Your parents or legal guardian will have to help if you are younger than 18. BRS can provide the following services:

- Initiate and complete the BRS referral process to determine your eligibility for services, prior to graduation;
- Get to know you and your family so you are comfortable in maintaining a relationship with your BRS counselor while you are still in high school. After graduation, your counselor will help you and your family understand how the services available from BRS differ from the the services your school was required to provide;
- Consult on course content that will help you prepare for employment, post-secondary education and/or independent living;
- Participate in Planning and Placement Team meetings during the last few years of high school to assist in developing appropriate transition goals and objectives. If you are interested in having your counselor attend any of these meetings, it will be important to give your counselor sufficient notice of the meeting time to ensure that she or he is available;
- Consult with you, your family and school staff to help promote employment experiences while you are still in school;
- Help you and your family become familiar with planning for and accessing needed employment-related adult service programs;

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- Help you and your family learn more about your disability and what jobs you may be able to pursue:
  - Help you and your family learn about Assistive Technology (AT);
  - Refer you and your family to advocacy organizations which can help you to advocate effectively for needed services; and
  - Develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that specifies what services and supports BRS will provide for you. The IPE also outlines your responsibilities as you take steps towards achieving a successful employment outcome.

### **How Do I Start to Work with BRS?**

You may call the BRS office nearest to your home (*see the list on page 60*) and ask to speak to a vocational rehabilitation counselor. If you feel more comfortable, your teacher, guidance counselor, parent or other adult can call for you.

Please review the **School to Work** section on the BRS Website at [www.ct.gov/brs](http://www.ct.gov/brs). It provides detailed information for students, parents, and teachers to help you through the process so that you will have an effective transition from school to work.

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# Rehabilitation Technology

## What Is Rehabilitation Technology?

Rehabilitation technology is the evaluation and use of devices that assist individuals with disabilities to maintain or improve their ability to function. The term also includes any services needed to test, try, or learn to use the devices. In vocational rehabilitation, rehabilitation technology is used for the purpose of assisting individuals to work more independently or to participate more independently in an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) leading to competitive employment. There are many different kinds of technology devices. Some are simple and easy to use, such as a wide grip pencil, a telephone with large buttons, a calculator with large keys, a writing guide for a sheet of paper, a magnifier, or an adapted keyboard. Others are more complex and may require training to use. Examples of complex items include a computer with voice recognition software and other communication devices, a power wheelchair or scooter, prosthetic and orthotic devices (artificial limbs, braces), and motor vehicle modifications.

Your BRS counselor will work with you to determine whether you need any rehabilitation technology devices or services. An evaluation by a technology specialist (an expert outside of BRS) may be provided to assist you in learning what technology is available and how it might improve your functioning as you think about your career plans and goals, or how specific job functions can be accommodated.

## What Is the Process to Get Rehabilitation Technology Services?

1. You and your counselor would include your need for rehabilitation technology in your IPE. If you need a simple device, your counselor may, in most cases, buy it quickly and easily.
2. When you and your counselor decide that you need a rehabilitation technology consultation, your counselor will contact the BRS consultant for a referral to a technology specialist. Arrangements will be made for the technology specialist to meet and evaluate you in your home, school, or place of employment.
3. During the meeting, the technology specialist will talk with you about your specific needs and employment goals and may ask you to do some tasks to determine your level of functioning.

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4. After the meeting, the technology specialist will write a report to your counselor describing his/her findings and recommendations.
  5. Your counselor will share the report with you and you will have an opportunity to ask any questions that you may have about the report. Once you and your counselor agree that the recommendations are necessary for your IPE to be successful, arrangements will be made to purchase the device or arrange for the service. The length of time it will take to receive the equipment depends on the type of technology, the availability and the purchase process. Customized devices (designed and manufactured especially to fit you) will take more time. BRS will also usually need to get competitive bids for higher cost purchases, which will increase the time required.
  6. BRS will try to accommodate your preferences and choices as much as possible. If you have a preferred product or vendor you'd like to try, tell your counselor.
  7. In some instances you may need training to learn how to use the equipment. You and your counselor can arrange for you to learn how to use the device once you receive the equipment. It will be your responsibility to cooperate with the training, to practice using the new device or technology and to complete all assignments.

### **What If I Have Questions or Concerns about My Rehabilitation Technology?**

Your counselor and the BRS central office consultant for technology are the key persons you can go to for answers regarding rehabilitation technology

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# Home Modifications

## What Are Home Modifications?

Home modifications are changes to the structure of your home that allow you to work more independently and participate in your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) that leads to work. Examples of home modifications include installing a ramp or a lift, or altering a doorway so that you can enter and exit your home unassisted. They may also include bathroom modifications or other alterations needed for you to achieve your employment goal. If you are self-employed, modifications to your place of business may also be provided, if needed, to allow you to perform your work more independently.

Your BRS counselor will work with you to determine if home modifications are a necessary part of your IPE. The length of time for this service to be completed may vary widely, depending on the complexity of the modification and the availability of contractors.

## What Is the Procedure to Have My Home Modified?

1. Once you request a home modification, your counselor and his or her supervisor will visit your home to evaluate your request and discuss options. If options other than a home modification appear more appropriate, your counselor will arrange the other options.
2. If a home modification appears to be the most appropriate action, your counselor will request that an architect be assigned. The architect will meet you and your counselor at your home to discuss the issue and possible solutions. The architect will submit a preliminary estimate based on the decided course of action.
3. All preliminary estimates and proposed drafts will be compared to the flexible cap (limit) within BRS. This limit helps BRS weigh the need for the home modification against a reasonable standard for the amount of the expenditure. BRS must be fiscally responsible as it administers services to all consumers with significant disabilities. BRS will explore all options before agreeing to home modifications.

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4. The District Director must approve estimates and drafts of any proposed work if the home modification is warranted.
  5. If your request moves forward based on need to fulfill your IPE and the bureau's standard for reasonableness, BRS would follow the rules and guidelines for the home modification as spelled out in the BRS Policy Manual. The property owner must sign a consent to authorize BRS to make the needed modifications.
  6. The bureau will request competitive bids from qualified contractors. You may provide the names of contractors whom you would like to give an opportunity to bid. It takes about four weeks to close the bidding process. Generally, the lowest bidder is awarded the contract. The service will be added to your IPE at this time.
  7. For most jobs, the contractor will need to secure a permit from the building inspector in your town. The contractor will work directly with you to schedule and perform the specified work. The contractor is also responsible for obtaining an inspection by the Town/City Building Inspector. Once the work is completed, you, your counselor and the architect will inspect the work to make sure it was done according to the plans. You will be asked to sign a copy of the bill indicating that the work is suitable before BRS will pay the contractor. All work is guaranteed for one year after completion. Beyond that, you are responsible for regular maintenance and upkeep.
  8. If the District Director denies a request, estimate, or plan, the counselor will review other options with you and give you information about the Client Assistance Program if you wish to appeal the decision.

Obtaining a home modification is a very detailed process that will require your full involvement. If home modifications are a part of your IPE, you will receive a copy of the BRS Policy Manual legal requirements and guidance detailing the Home Modifications process that you may review with your counselor.

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# Vehicle Modifications

## What Are Vehicle Modifications?

Vehicle modifications are any mechanical or structural changes to a passenger car or other motor vehicle that will permit you to safely drive or ride as a passenger, for the purpose of employment. Generally, modifications may be considered as part of your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) when accessible public transportation or other means are unavailable. The length of time for the process of getting a vehicle modified can vary widely depending on the complexity of the modifications needed.

## What Is the Procedure For Having a Vehicle Modified?

1. The vehicle modification process through the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) is complex and involves an investment of time and money for you and BRS. Your counselor oversees the process and responds to inquiries regarding vehicle modifications from you and the vendor who will do the modification. Your counselor also coordinates with the driver training consultant, the driver rehabilitation specialist, and the automotive engineering consultant to review, prescribe, approve, and evaluate your vehicle modification.
2. Your counselor will refer you to the Easter Seals Mobility Center in Meriden, CT and/or the BRS Driver Training Program to determine:
  - √ If you can drive or learn to drive;
  - √ Whether you can independently transfer from your wheelchair to the vehicle (if applicable);
  - √ The kind of modifications needed to meet your needs; and
  - √ The type of vehicle you should purchase for modification.

After this evaluation, the Mobility Center will prepare a comprehensive report. If it is determined that you can drive, the Mobility Center will prepare a comprehensive vehicle modification prescription.

3. You and your counselor will meet to develop your IPE. **If the recommended modifications are needed for you to achieve your employment goal, they will be included in your IPE.**



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4. If you are not the owner of the vehicle to be modified, you will need to obtain written permission to use the modified vehicle for at least five years.
  5. Once your IPE is approved, your BRS counselor will coordinate the work with all who will be involved in your vehicle modification.
  6. The vehicle modification prescription will be sent to approved vendors\* for competitive bid. It usually takes about three weeks to complete the bidding process. Generally, the lowest qualified bidder will be awarded the contract. If you want a qualified vendor who is not the lowest bidder to modify your vehicle, you will have the option to pay the difference between the lowest qualified bid and that of your preferred vendor.  
*\* Approved Vendors – Vehicle modification vendors who have and keep certification through the National Mobility Equipment Dealers Association (NMEDA) Quality Assurance Program.*
  7. After the bid has been awarded, you may proceed to buy your vehicle. Most consumers buy a vehicle through the vehicle modification vendor. These vendors have new car dealer and used car dealer licenses through the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV).
  8. The vendor who is awarded the job will contact you to arrange to pick up your vehicle. The amount of time required to complete the job depends upon its complexity and the company's schedule. Basic van modifications take up to 60 days. You will be expected to travel at least once to the vendor's location for a "fitting" to position the equipment to best meet your needs. Upon completion, your vehicle will be inspected for compliance with the specified modifications and other requirements. You will also be asked to sign a statement verifying that the work is complete and satisfactory before BRS will pay the vendor.
  9. Upon completion of your vehicle modification, you should contact the Driver Training Unit to advise them of your availability for training and/or licensing.

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10. The vehicle owner is responsible to maintain and insure the vehicle and the modifications. Equipment installed or modified by the vendor has a one year warranty. During the first 90 days of warranty coverage, minor adjustments or preventative maintenance will be performed by the vendor at no cost.

### **What If I Have Questions or Concerns about My Vehicle Modifications?**

Your counselor is the key person that you can contact for answers.

Obtaining a vehicle modification is a very detailed process that will require your involvement. If a vehicle modification is a part of your IPE, you will receive a copy of the Vehicle Modifications Handbook that you may review with your counselor.

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## Restoration Services

### What Are Restoration Services?

Restoration services includes any form of recognized treatment for mental or physical impairments.

### When Am I Eligible for Physical or Mental Restoration Services?

Under your Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), restoration services may be provided if you need them in order to achieve your employment goal and if the treatment is not available to you through other resources such as your private insurance, Medicaid, Medicare or through the state mental health and addiction system. These services will be provided only if they are expected to substantially increase your ability to perform on the job within a reasonable period of time, which would generally be no longer than six months. All restoration services through BRS are time-limited.

The following are examples of restoration services that might be provided if you and your counselor agree they are required for you to attain your employment goal:

- Physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy or corrective surgery;
- Psychotherapy, cognitive training or behavioral treatment;
- Prosthetic and orthotic devices;
- Mobility devices, communication devices, eyeglasses and hearing aids;
- Necessary hospitalization in connection with surgery or treatment; and/or
- Special services for individuals with end-stage renal disease.

### How Do I Find Out More about Restoration Services?

Your counselor will answer any questions you may have concerning restoration services and whether or not they are required as part of your IPE. If you and your counselor agree that restoration services are needed, they will be provided by recognized professionals who are licensed to practice their respective field or specialty

## **Consumer Handbook Summary**

Now that you have reviewed the BRS Consumer Handbook, we hope you have a better understanding of the many vocational rehabilitation services that may be available to help you as you prepare to find or keep a job. Please review any questions you may have with your counselor. You may want to bring it with you to each meeting you have with your counselor so that specific sections may be discussed.

It is our mission to maximize opportunities for people in Connecticut with disabilities to live, learn and work independently. We look forward to working with you to fulfill this mission.

Please complete the BRS Consumer Handbook Evaluation Form at the end of this publication and give it to your counselor or mail it in to the address on the form. Your feedback will help us to monitor and improve services, as needed.

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## **BRS Central, Regional & Local Offices**

### **Central Office**

55 Farmington Avenue, 12th floor (*effective June 1, 2014*)

Hartford, CT 06105-3702

Telephone: 860-424-4840 or 4844; Fax: 860-424-4850

Toll Free in Connecticut: 800-537-2549

Video Phone: 860-920-7163

### **Northern Region**

3580 Main Street, Hartford, CT 06120

Telephone: 860-723-1400 Fax: 860-566-4766

Video Phone: 860-920-7172 or 860-856-6000

#### *Local Offices:*

Danielson (*Killingly*): 860-412-7070

East Hartford: 959-200-4400

Enfield: 860-899-3569

Manchester (*Willimantic*): 860-647-5960; Video Phone: 860-288-4870

New Britain: 860-612-3569

### **Southern Region**

414 Chapel Street, Suite 301, New Haven, CT 06511

Telephone: 203-974-3000 Fax: 203-789-7850

Video Phone: 203-584-9840

#### *Local Offices:*

Ansonia: 203-732-1667

Middletown: 860-704-3070

New London: 860-439-7686

Norwich: 860-859-5720; Video Phone: 860-237-3525

### **Western Region**

1057 Broad Street, Bridgeport, CT 06604

Telephone: 203-551-5500 Fax: 203-579-6903

Video Phone: 203-416-6761

#### *Local Offices:*

Danbury: 203-207-8990

Stamford: 203-251-9430

Torrington: 860-496-6990

Waterbury: 203-578-4550; Video Phone: 203-577-5319

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## Notes

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## Notes

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The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS)  
is a division of the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS).

DORS is an Equal Opportunity Affirmative Action Employer and offers its programs regardless of race, color, national origin, physical or mental disability sexual orientation, religion, age, sex, or marital status.

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, this handbook is available upon request in an alternate format.

If you need this report in an alternate format, please use the contact information listed below:

1-800-537-2549 (Toll-free in Connecticut only)

860-424-4871 (Voice)

860-920-7163 (Video Phone)

E-mail: [evelyn.knight@ct.gov](mailto:evelyn.knight@ct.gov)

Web Site: [www.ct.gov/brs](http://www.ct.gov/brs)

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## BRS Consumer Handbook Evaluation Form

After you have had a chance to look at and use this book, we would appreciate you completing this evaluation form. Your feedback will help us learn if this handbook is useful and if there are ways we may improve it. Please complete this page, remove it from the book and, return it to your BRS counselor or to the BRS central office address below:

Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)  
Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS)  
55 Farmington Avenue, 12<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Hartford, CT 06105-3702

**Attention: Evelyn Oliver Knight, Public Affairs Consultant**

Thank you for your assistance.

Who is the person completing this form? *(Check one)*

BRS Consumer     Parent     Other *(Explain)* \_\_\_\_\_

Which BRS office did you use? \_\_\_\_\_

How helpful was the information in this handbook to you? *(Check one)*

Very helpful                       Helpful                       Not very helpful

This handbook included: *(Check one)*

\_\_\_\_\_ Too much information.  
\_\_\_\_\_ The right amount of information.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Too little information. In this case, what information would you like included? \_\_\_\_\_

Was the information in the handbook written in a way that could be easily understood?

Yes                                       No

If you answered "no", please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

This handbook included all of the important parts of the BRS program. Please check one of the following statements.

I appreciate having the handbook about the whole program.  
 I would have preferred only getting information about the following:

\_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any suggestions or comments to help improve this handbook?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

*Use the back of this page or an additional sheet of paper, if needed.  
Please remove this page and mail it in.*

