

EMPLOYMENT

Employment is a significant part of any individual's life. Employment provides for the financial support of the individual and/or their family. It can assist a person in realizing a level of financial freedom as well as achieving a certain degree of self-satisfaction. Employment is a reasonable goal for the majority of persons who have been paralyzed by a spinal cord injury. This chapter is a guide to meaningful employment resources.

CURRENT LAWS & REGULATIONS

(Excerpt from Computer Resources for People with Disabilities,
The Alliance for Technology)

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

Modeled after Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the ADA provides civil rights protection against discrimination for individuals with disabilities similar to the protection provided in other legislation on the basis of race, gender, age, nationality, and religion. The ADA defines *disability* functionally as any condition that impairs major life activities such as seeing, hearing, walking, or working, and it covers nearly 900 specific disabilities. Under separate sections, it mandates accessibility and accommodation requirements in public facilities, employment, state and local government services, transportation, and communication. The law intends to break down the barriers that exist in these five areas and to provide equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities.

Among the many important rights and protections addressed in the ADA is the requirement that an employer with 15 or more employees may not discriminate against an individual with a disability because of the disability when the person is qualified to perform the essential functions of the job, with or without a reasonable accommodation. The ADA defines *reasonable accommodation* as some modification in a job's task or structure, or in the workplace, that will enable the qualified employee with a disability to do the job. The modifications or changes, which can include the use of assistive technology and technology access, must be made, unless the change creates an undue hardship for the employer. Preliminary findings of the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities indicate that the majority of accommodations cost less than \$500 and many have little or no cost at all. For more specific information about ADA requirements affecting *Employment* contact:

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

1801 L Street, NW
Washington, DC 20507
(800) 800-3302 (TDD)
(202) 663-4494 (TDD for 202 Area Code)

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM

Department of Social Services

Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

25 Sigourney Street, 11th Floor
Hartford, Connecticut 06106
www.brs.statew.ct.us

(860) 424-4839 (TDD/TTY)

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a program of the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services which assists persons with significant physical or mental disabilities to prepare for, find or keep a job. The VR program serves eligible individuals who have a physical or mental condition that has a significant impact on their ability to enter or maintain employment. The VR program serves persons with all types of physical and mental conditions except persons who are legally blind. Individuals with legal blindness receive vocational rehabilitation services through the Board of Education and Services 154 Windsor Ave., Windsor, CT 06095, 1-800-842-4510 or 602-4000.

How do I know if the Vocational Rehabilitation Program can assist me?

Contact the BRS office closest to your home, or call 1-800-537-2549. You will talk to staff whom can discuss your situation and answer your questions about vocational rehabilitation. In addition, BRS offices offer orientation sessions which provide more detailed information about the VR program.

How do I find out if I am eligible for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program?

If you apply for vocational rehabilitation, you will be asked to provide information about your medical condition and how it affects your ability to find and/or keep a job. With your vocational rehabilitation counselor, you will also review your employment and educational history. This and other information you provide will help your counselor determine if you are eligible for the VR program. To be eligible:

- (1) **you must have a disability**, that is, you have a physical or mental condition which poses a substantial barrier to employment; AND
- (2) **you must require VR services** to prepare for, find and succeed in employment, with a priority on a paid job in the competitive labor force.

Resources are limited, so the law requires that BRS first provide services to persons with the most significant disabilities. This is called an Order of Selection. The significance of a person's disability is determined by looking at the limitations caused by the disability, and the services the person needs as a result. Your VR counselor can give you more detailed information about how this decision is made. If your counselor needs more specific information about your disability and its impact on your ability to work, you may be asked to participate in medical, psychiatric, psychological or other types of evaluations. If you are asked to have such tests, your counselor will explain why they are necessary, and BRS will pay for them. Your counselor will tell you in writing whether or not you are eligible for vocational rehabilitation. If you are not eligible, you will be told why, and you will receive information on how you may appeal the decision, if you disagree with it.

What kinds of services will BRS provide?

BRS provides services that are needed to assist you in reaching your vocational goal. Since the employment plan is tailored to meet your unique needs, these services vary from one person to another. Here is a partial list of services that BRS may provide:

- Vocational counseling and guidance
- Job search assistance
- Skill training and career education in vocational and other schools, and on-the-job training in business and industry
- assistive technology services, such as adaptive equipment for mobility, communication and specific work activities
- Vehicle and home modifications
- Supported employment services
- Services to assist in restoring or improving a physical or mental condition
- Services which support your access to other services you need to meet the goals of your employment plan, such as transportation assistance

What is the Client Assistance Program?

The Client Assistance Program (CAP) is an independent advocacy program located at the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities. CAP provides advice, advocacy, and, if necessary, legal representation to individuals who have concerns about the services they are receiving from BRS, BESB, independent living centers, and other community rehabilitation programs. CAP is located at 60-B Weston St., Hartford, CT 06120; (860) 297-4326 or 1-800-842-7303.

Offices of the

Bureau of Rehabilitation Services

Bridgeport District Office 1057 Broad St., Bridgeport, CT 06604

Tel: (203) 551-5500 (V/TDD/TTY) Fax: (203) 579-6903

Stamford: (203) 251-9430 (V/TDD/TTY)

Hartford District Office 3580 Main St., Hartford, CT 06120

Tel: (860) 723-1400 (V/TDD/TTY) Fax: (860) 566-4766

East Hartford: (860) 289-2904 (V)

Enfield: (860) 741-2852 (V/TDD/TTY)

Manchester: (860) 647-5960 (V/TDD/TTY)

New Britain: (860) 612-3569 (V/TDD/TTY)

West Hartford - American School for the Deaf: (860) 233-8240 (V/TDD/TTY)

New Haven District Office 414 Chapel St., Suite 301, New Haven, CT 06511

Tel: (203) 974-3000 (V) (203) 974-3013 or -3009 (TDD/TTY) Fax: (203) 789-7850

Ansonia: (203) 735-9444 (V/TDD/TTY)

Middletown: (860) 704-3070 (V)

Norwich District Office 113 Salem Tpke., North Bldg., Suite 200 Norwich, CT 06360

Tel: (860) 859-5720 (V) (860) 859-5732 (TDD/TTY) Fax: (860) 859-5733

Dayville: (860) 779-2204 (V/TDD/TTY)

New London: (860) 701-3750 (V/TDD/TTY)

Waterbury District Office 249 Thomaston Ave., Waterbury, CT 06702

Tel: (203) 578-4550 (V/TDD/TTY) Fax: (203) 578-4590

Brookfield: (203) 775-4700, x249 (V)

Danbury: (203) 207-8990 (V/TDD/TTY)

Torrington: (860) 496-6990 (V/TDD/TTY)

Technology-Related Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities Act (Tech Act)

The Tech Act provides federal funds to assist in developing easily available, consumer-responsive systems of access to assistive technology, technology services, and information. The law requires that state-developed systems must, at a minimum, have in place a process for evaluating and responding to the concerns and suggestions of citizens with disabilities. The

mission on the organization is to increase independence and improve the lives of individuals with disabilities through increased access to assistive technology for work, school and community living. The Tech Act focuses on eliminating barriers that prevent consumers of disability services from gaining access to assistive technology. The contact for persons in Connecticut is www.ctrechact.com.

The Tech Act provides a definition of assistive technology that became the standard definition used in all subsequent federal legislation and regulations. In the Tech Act, assistive technology includes devices that are not necessarily computer-based. The definition is broad enough to include “any tool or item that increases, maintains, or improves functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities” in such areas as seating, mobility, daily living, and environmental control. In addition to “high-tech” devices, it includes “low-tech” and “no-tech” devices such as mechanical page-turners, custom-molded seats, single-switch-activated toys, and hand-held magnifiers.

The Assistive Technology Loan Program: Administered by State of Connecticut Department of Social Services, Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, in partnership with People’s Bank (860) 424-4871 or (800) 537-2549 (V/TDD). Assistive technology can give people with disabilities greater independence on the job, in school and in the daily activities of community living. If carefully chosen to meet individual needs, equipment and devices now available can enable persons with disabilities to participate more fully in work, school, home, recreational and cultural pursuits.

To qualify for a loan, a person must have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. The amount of a loan depends on the cost of the equipment and the person’s ability to repay. Loans may be repaid over the anticipated useful life of the equipment, up to a maximum of five years. In addition to the new loan program, *The TECH ACT Project* provides other services, including a single point of entry at any one of Connecticut’s five independent living centers (see below) where people can find out more about available technology and get other services to help them acquire it. At these centers, trained peer technology counselors will work with consumers to obtain product information, apply for loans to acquire technology, and locate other potential funding sources for the purchase of needed equipment and devices.

For information about assistive technology, or to apply for a loan under the Assistive Technology Loan Program, contact the peer technology counselor at the independent living center near you.

Job Training Partnership Act

(Excerpt from Connecticut Career Path, SOICC)

In Connecticut, the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) is administered by the nine Regional Workforce Development Boards. They provide job training and job-related educational opportunities to state residents. JTPA programs assist school dropouts, welfare recipients, unskilled adults, older workers, displaced homemakers and people who face barriers

to employment, such as those who have been laid off or unemployed for a long time. Participants are helped to find affordable childcare and transportation to allow them to participate in programs.

In addition to training in a wide range of vocations, services include remedial education, job-related math and classes to help individuals gain access to jobs. JTPA also offers job-search assistance, career-change services, entrepreneur training and other opportunities. Through this program, people have found such jobs as data processors, computer technicians, health aides and auto mechanics. For more information, contact:

Regional Workforce Development Boards

Ansonia/Bridgeport/Norwalk/Stamford	203 576-7030
Bristol/New Britain	860 223-4421
Danbury/Torrington	860 489-3556
Danielson/Windham	860 455-8009
Hartford	860 522-1111
Meriden/Middletown	860 343-5085
New Haven	203 624-1493
New London/Norwich	860 440-3534
Waterbury	203 574-6971

WHERE TO GO FOR SERVICES

If you are seeking a job, need advice or simply wish to explore opportunities, contact your nearest DOL office (above) or Workforce Development Board (below).

For more information, contact:
Alice Carrier 263-6575
Department of Labor
200 Folly Brook Boulevard
Wethersfield, CT 06109
Telephone: (860) 263-6000

Return to Work through the Worker's Compensation Commission's Rehabilitation Services

The main goal of Rehabilitation Services is to help the injured worker get back to work and regain independence. Prompt and well-planned vocational rehabilitation will prevent excessive losses sustained by both employees and employers. The injured worker will be prepared for return to work sooner than otherwise might be possible. Each person's program will be different, based on each person's needs. Services may include:

- Aptitude testing
- Evaluation
- Counseling
- Job Seeking Skills
- Job Development
- Formal Training

Rehabilitation Services offers financial incentives for employers to take the time to train injured workers to return to the work force with new skills and abilities. Training may involve hands-on learning for real jobs that allows employees to teach individuals their own methods and procedures in an active business environment. Just about any job, from unskilled to skilled, can be prepared for using this approach.

You can apply by calling the Worker's Commission District Office nearest your home. A Counseling Coordinator assigned to that office would answer any questions you have about Rehabilitation Services and will send you an application, brochure and return envelope. When your application is received, your case will be assigned to a Coordinator, and you will then be scheduled for an interview to find out whether you are eligible for services.

Worker's Compensation Commission

Worker's Compensation Commission
 Rehabilitation Services
 21 Oak St. 4th Floor
 Hartford, CT 06106
 Telephone: (860) 493-1500
<http://wcc.state.ct.us/>

Connecticut Works www.ctdol.state.ct.us/ctworks/ctworks.htm

The mission of this organization is to enhance economic development in Connecticut by addressing the special employment and training needs of both job seekers and employers. Connecticut Works is a unique collaboration of state, regional, and local organizations addressing the workforce development needs of the state - both our residents who are seeking jobs and the businesses who want to employ them. Services offered to job seekers focus on career counseling, job search assistance and referral to skills training, while businesses receive recruiting, job training, and related support. There are presently nineteen Connecticut Works Centers open throughout the state.

The one-stop concept brings many services conveniently together. Addressing the work force development needs of the state's residents and employers, the centers and satellite locations will provide high-quality, customer-driven and universally accessible education and training services. A computer network will connect users to job listings, labor market trends and training opportunities.

Many core services, including the following, are provided:

- Preliminary assessment of skills and aptitude testing;
- Information on an array of employment-related services;
- Career assistance and job counseling;
- Job search, referral and placement services;
- Help in filing initial claims for Unemployment Insurance;
- Job-search workshops;
- Information on job training and education programs, including; financial assistance
- Self-help information on career exploration; and
- Self-service Career Services Centers.

One can choose from a wide array of self-service options for a self-directed job search or to retrieve information on the occupations most in demand. Group services include workshops on managing change, preparing a resume, job hunting techniques, interviewing tips and becoming an entrepreneur. If additional help is needed, counselors are available for one-on-one assistance in testing and job counseling. The One-Stop Career Centers have telephones and copying machines available for use. They also offer a variety of resource materials such as magazines, newspapers and books that have information on occupations, the economy and labor market trends.

BENEFITS FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES WHO WORK

It is possible for people with disabilities receiving Social Security or supplemental security income (SSI) to work and still receive monthly cash payments and Medicare or Medicaid. This is called “work incentives.” The rules are different for Social Security and SSI beneficiaries. Following are the rules that apply under each program. For more copies, or additional materials on work incentives, call any Social Security office. Ask for the work incentives expert at the social security administration/work incentive coordinators. For filing applications or questions about individual claims, calls must be directed to the general Social Security number, 1-800-2345-SSA or utilize the website at

<http://www.socialsecurity.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/generalinfo.htm>

Connecticut Small Business Center: <http://www.ct-clic.com/business/BizCenter.htm>

The Connecticut Small Business Development Center is a statewide organization funded through a matching grant from the Federal Small Business Administration to The University of Connecticut. The major goal of the Center is to provide professional counseling and training programs in all functional areas of business management, including the business plan. These services are provided by the Small Business Development Center staff, which consists of professional counselors, faculty, and members of the business community.

WHAT TYPE OF ASSISTANCE IS AVAILABLE?

Consulting

The Small Business Development Center offers individual consulting in such areas as preventive feasibility, marketing, record keeping, financial planning, production, and general management for small businesses engaged in retail, wholesale, manufacturing, and service-oriented functions.

Continuing Education

The Small Business Development Center offers workshops, conferences, and courses all geared to the needs of your business. Working with professionals in business, trade associations, and colleges, the CSBDC provides expert instruction on specific and varied business topics. Courses range from advanced presentations aimed at furthering the growth potential of established companies to introductory courses for those just starting out in business.

Loan Packaging

Our unique programs provide professionals who are experts in management and financial assistance. Combining our staff's resources with other professional in business, the CSBDC can assist you in financial planning and loan packaging.

Adult Education Opportunities

(Excerpt from Connecticut Career Pathways, SOICC)

These programs are for persons who are at least 16 years old and no longer enrolled in high school. Several programs allow you to finish the requirements of your high school diploma - at no cost to you! They include the following:

- General Educational Development (GED) Test
- Adult High School Credit Diploma Program
- External Diploma Program
- Regional Vocational-Technical School System Adult Credit Diploma Program.

One of these programs may meet your needs as an adult learner. Several provide credit for prior academic, work or military experience and may offer independent study projects. Other adult education program offerings include:

- Basic academic skills courses in reading, writing, mathematics and oral communication;
- English for adults with difficulty in speaking, writing, reading or understanding the English language;
- Citizenship preparation for foreign-born adults; and
- General interest courses for life enrichment or career advancement.

For further information, contact your local school system or the State Department of Education Bureau of Adult Education and Training at (860) 638-4167 or www.sde.ct.gov.

Information on Finding a Job

It takes some people a great deal of time and effort to find a job they enjoy. Others may walk right into an ideal employment situation. Don't be discouraged if you have to pursue many leads. Friends, neighbors, teachers, and counselors may know of available jobs in your field of interest. Read the want ads. Consult state employment service offices and private or nonprofit employment agencies, or contact employers directly.

Where to Learn About Job Openings

- Parents, friends, and neighbors
- School or college placement services
- Classified ads
- Local and out-of-town newspapers
- Professional journals
- Trade magazines
- Employment agencies and career consultants
- State employment service offices
- Internet networks and resources
- Civil service announcements (Federal, State, local)
- Labor Unions
- Professional Associations (State and local chapters)
- Libraries and community centers
- Women's counseling and employment programs
- Youth programs
- Employers

Job search methods:

Want ads. The "Help Wanted" ads in newspapers list hundreds of jobs. Be aware that the classified ads sometimes do not give some important information. Keep the following in mind if you are using want ads:

- Answer ads promptly, since openings may be filled quickly, even before the ad stops appearing in the paper.
- Follow the ads diligently. Check them every day, as early as possible, to give you an advantage.
- Beware of "no experience necessary" ads. These ads often signal low wages, poor working conditions, or straight commission work.
- Keep a record of all ads to which you have responded, including the specific skills, educational background, and personal qualifications required for the position.

Internet networks and resources. A variety of information on jobs and job search resources and techniques is currently available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day. Internet resources include Usenet newsgroups, Telnet sites, and World Wide Web resources.

In addition to the listings of companies, professional societies, academic institutions, and government agencies, it is possible to search employment ad and career information databases directly. Available information includes government reports, salary surveys, job listings, and even “networking” contact within organizations. You can find out about companies or academic institutions directly, as well as the cities in which they are located.

When searching employment ad databases, it is sometimes possible to post your resume on-line or send it to an employer via electronic mail. Some sources provide this service free of charge once you have access to the Internet. However, be careful that you are not going to incur any additional charges for postings or updates.

No single network or resource will contain all information on employment or career opportunities, so be prepared to search for what you need. Job listings may be posted by field or discipline so it is best to begin your search using topics or “keywords.” It may be helpful to consult a reference book such as *The Internet Yellow Pages*, which should be available in most libraries.

Public employment service. The State employment service sometimes called the Job Service operates in coordination with the U.S. Employment Service of the U.S. Department of Labor. About 1,700 local offices, also known as employment service centers, help job seekers find jobs and help employers find qualified workers at no cost to themselves. To find the office nearest you, look in the State government telephone listings under “Job Service” or “Employment.”

A computerized job network system-*America’s Job Bank*-run by the U.S. Department of Labor, lists approximately 100,000 job openings each week. Wide ranges of jobs are listed all over the country, and most are full-time jobs in the private sector. Job seekers can access these listings through the use of a personal computer in any local public employment service office, as well as in several hundred military installations. In addition, some State employment agencies have set up *America’s Job Bank* in other settings, including libraries, schools, shopping malls, and correctional facilities. *America’s Job Bank* is also available on-line through the Internet and can be accessed at the following World Wide Web address: <http://www.ajb.dni.us>

Federal job information. For information about employment with the U.S. Government, call the Federal Job Information Center’s *Career America Connection*, operated by the Office of Personnel Management. The phone number is (202) 606-2700, or write to: Federal Job Information Center, 1900 E St. NW., Room 1416, Washington, DC 20415 or at: <http://www.fedworld.gov>.

Private employment agencies. These agencies can also be very helpful. Most agencies operate on a commission basis, with the fee dependent upon a successful match. You or the hiring company will have to pay a fee for the matching service. Find out the exact cost and who is

responsible for paying it before using the service. While employment agencies can help you save time and contact employers who otherwise may be difficult to locate, in some cases, your costs may outweigh the benefits. Consider any guarantee they offer when figuring the cost.

College career planning and placement offices. College placement offices facilitate matching job openings with suitable job seekers. You can set up schedules and use available facilities for interviews with recruiters or scan lists of part-time, temporary, and summer jobs maintained in many of these offices. You also can get counseling, testing, and job search advice and take advantage of their career resource library. Here you also will be able to identify and evaluate your interests, work values, and skills; attend workshops on such topics as job search strategy, resume writing, letter writing, and effective interviewing; critique drafts of resumes and videotapes of mock interviews; explore files of resumes and references; and attend job fairs conducted by the office.

Community agencies. Many nonprofit organizations offer counseling, career development, and job placement services, generally targeted to a particular group, such as women, youth, minorities, ex-offenders, or older workers.

Many communities have career counseling, training, placement, and support services for employment. These programs are sponsored by a variety of organizations, including churches and synagogues, nonprofit organizations, social service agencies, the State employment service, and vocational rehabilitation agencies. Many cities have commissions that provide services for these special groups.

Employers. It is possible to apply directly to employers without a referral. You may locate a potential employer in the *Yellow Pages*, in directories of local chambers of commerce, and in other directories that provide information about employers. When you find an employer you are interested in, you can send a cover letter and resume or file a job application even if you don't know for certain that an opening exists.

Tips for finding the Right Job, a U.S. Department of Labor pamphlet, offers advice on determining your job skills, organizing your job search, writing a resume, and making the most of an interview. *Job Search Guide: Strategies For Professionals*, another U.S. Department of Labor publication, also discusses specific steps that job seekers can follow to identify employment opportunities. This publication includes sections on handling your job loss, managing your personal resources, assessing your skills and interests, researching the job market, conducting the job search and networking, writing resumes and cover letters, employment interviewing and testing, and sources of additional information. Check with your State employment service office, or order a copy of these publications from the U.S. Government Printing Office. Phone: (202) 512-1800 for price and ordering information.

Applying for a Job

Resumes and application forms. Resumes and application forms are two ways to provide employers with written evidence of your skills and knowledge. Most information is common to

both the resume and application form, but the way the information is presented differs. Some employers prefer a resume while others require an application form.

There are many ways of organizing a resume. Depending upon the job you are applying for, you should choose the format that best highlights your skills, training, and experience. It may be helpful to look at different examples. Examples can be found in a variety of books and publications available through public libraries or career guidance centers. Also, ask someone to read your resume and suggest ways to improve it.

In completing an application form, make sure you fill it out properly and follow instructions. In general, the same type of information is included on an application form as in a resume. Don't omit any information asked for and be sure to check that all information provided is correct.

What Goes Into a Resume?

A resume summarizes your qualifications and employment history. It usually is required when applying for managerial, administrative, professional, or technical positions. Although there is no set format, a resume should contain the following information:

- Name, address, and telephone number.
- Employment objective. State the type of work or specific job you are seeking.
- Education, including school name and address, dates of attendance, curriculum, and highest grade completed or degree awarded.
- Experience, paid or volunteer. Include the following for each job: Job title, name and address of employer, and dates of employment. Describe your job duties.
- Special skills, knowledge of machinery, proficiency in foreign languages, honors received, awards, or membership in organizations.
- Note on your resume "references are available upon request."

Cover letters. A cover letter should be sent with a resume or application form, as a way to introduce yourself to employers. It should capture the employer's attention, follow a business letter format, and should generally include the following information:

- The name and address of the specific person to whom the letter is addressed
- The reason for your interest in the company or position
- Your main qualifications for the position (in brief)
- A request for an interview
- Your phone number

Interviewing. An interview gives you the best opportunity to show an employer your qualifications, so it pays to be well prepared. Each interview is different, however. The following provides some helpful information.

Job Interview Tips

Preparation:

- Learn about the organization.
- Have a specific job or jobs in mind.
- Review your qualifications for the job.
- Prepare answers to broad questions about yourself.
- Review your resume.
- Practice an interview with a friend or relative.
- Arrive before the scheduled time of your interview.

Personal Appearance:

- Be well groomed.
- Dress appropriately.
- Do not chew gum or smoke.

The Interview:

- Answer each question concisely.
- Respond promptly.
- Use good manners. Learn the name of your interviewer and shake hands as you meet.
- Use proper English and avoid slang.
- Be cooperative and enthusiastic.
- Ask questions about the position and the organization.
- Thank the interviewer, and follow up with a letter.

Test (if employer gives one):

- Listen closely to instructions.
- Read each question carefully.
- Write legibly and clearly.
- Budget your time wisely and don't dwell on one question.

Information To Bring to an Interview:

- Social Security number.
- Driver's license number.
- Resume. Although not all employees require applicant's to bring a resume, you should be able to furnish the interviewer with information about your education, training, and previous employment.
- References. An employer usually requires three references. Get permission from people before using their names, and make sure they will give you a good reference. Try to avoid using relatives. For each reference, provide the following information: Name, address, telephone number, and job title.

Where the Jobs Are

(Excerpt from Job Search Strategies for the Disabled)

Although workplace attitudes toward people with disabilities are changing, the unemployment rate among the job-aged disabled population is more than 60 percent, as

compared with less than 10 percent among the general population. Two out of three people with disabilities are not working. And of those, two out of three *want* to work. With roughly \$200 billion in benefits being paid out each year to nonworking people with disabilities, it just doesn't make sense for businesses to say they can't afford to accommodate people with disabilities.

The following three publications are considered to be the bibles for labor market research:

1. The *Guide for Occupational Exploration* is a user-friendly reference work written in nontechnical language. It divides the world of work into 12 major interest areas, which are divided into 66 work groups, and then into subgroups with specific job titles.
2. The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* offers full-length descriptions of some 200 jobs, with an outline of working conditions, salary data, and growth projections.
3. The **Dictionary of Occupational Titles** is self-explanatory.

These publications are widely available in libraries, or they can be purchased through the BLS Chicago sales office (312/353-1880). The Bureau of Labor Statistics also conducts and publishes many wage and salary surveys, another area worth studying before you begin your job search. The Bureau of Labor Statistics has nine regional offices around country.

Conclusion

There are many factors that may influence the employment outcomes of persons with SCI. Current studies report five years status post injury only 14%-28% of individuals with spinal cord injuries are employed. However, the more education a person has, the more likely they are to find work.

This chapter on employment is lengthy because a person with SCI will need to be his/her own advocate. Career exploration and contact with community resources must begin as soon as possible. The most successful person will be the one who has taken advantage of all resources, mapped out a career strategy and acquired the necessary skills to work. Determination is the foundation upon which vocational planning builds. Hopefully, this section will be a support and a starting place wherever and whenever you find yourself ready to begin. Good Luck!

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