



Collaborative Relationships:

Vocational rehabilitation and assistive technology

By Gregory Staub, MA

CAVEWAS Corner

Dear fellow colleagues and readers, here is our most recent contribution to CAVEWAS Corner.

As many of you know, CAVEWAS (Canadian Assessment, Vocational Evaluation and Work Adjustment Society) is a member society of VRA Canada, serving in large part to represent and support the professional and developmental needs of vocational evaluators as well as professional rehab personnel specializing in work adjustment of injured workers and the like. In this section, you will find current and candid articles authored by CAVEWAS members, non-members (and future members alike) that will share, discuss, and communicate with you developments and changes affecting our membership. Amongst them issues of best practice, professional development and designation, as well as industry trends.

We hope you continue to find the content in this section stimulating, motivating, and informative and we encourage your ongoing participation and contributions.

Enjoy!

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If you are a CAVEWAS member and have any ideas, opinions or thoughts relevant to this section and you would like to share, discuss, and communicate them in the next issue, please contact: Jeff Cohen at jcohen@vocationalalternatives.com We also encourage you to join our group on LinkedIn.

As all qualified vocational rehabilitation counsellors already know, it is extremely important to utilize a collaborative approach to assist individuals with their reintegration into not only their communities but, also into meaningful, obtainable and, most importantly, sustainable employment. As vocational rehabilitation specialists working in the field, we far too often have clients tell us about their ongoing frustrations with their inability to do certain tasks that they had no difficulty with prior to the onset of their accident, injury or disability.

We have all observed lasting and life altering impairments experienced by our clients even after working with a multitude of medical professionals and therapists; all of which efforts have been in attempt to assist the client to do many of the simple tasks that most of us take for granted. However, as qualified vocational rehabilitation counsellors, we are often thrust in to the role of assisting our clients take the 'next step' in their rehabilitation (beyond activities of daily living) and, within the scope of their impairments, explore ways to make what most of our clients think is impossible, possible.

As vocational evaluators and rehabilitation counsellors we are key members of a comprehensive rehabilitation team and specialize in our clients' ultimate goal of reintegrating into paid employment. We must determine our clients' abilities, aptitudes, and interests and, with understanding their impairments as well as employment

outlook information, match them to potentially suitable occupations (and especially for our more severely impaired clients, help them source, secure, maintain, and make the most of found opportunities). The last point is salient as too often clients express disappointment and frustration with their inability to successfully function and maintain their newly acquired employment role.

“Assessing and re-assessing the work environment for our clients is critical to a sustainable outcome.”

In addition to our initial evaluation, job-skills matching, and development, qualified vocational evaluators and rehabilitation counsellors should have a strong working knowledge and practical understanding of what it is our client is going to do when engaged in the day-to-day employment duties we recommend. It isn't just about matching abilities, aptitudes, and interests, but also offering recommendations that will facilitate improved employment outcomes. Assessing and re-assessing the work environment with a particular focus on how our client is able to interact with other individuals, employment related equipment and tasks, is critical to a sustainable outcome.

After working with a wide variety

of individuals with various types of disabilities and injuries I adopted the mantra of "making the impossible possible" through the use of Assistive Technology (AT), environmental adaption and reasonable accommodation. I have learned as a rehabilitation specialist that often times our clients' desired personal and employment goals (and potential recommendations by evaluators) are abandoned prematurely prior considering the use of AT. Having a working knowledge and understanding of AT, equipment and environmental adaptation needs to be more closely considered in vocational evaluation and planning efforts.

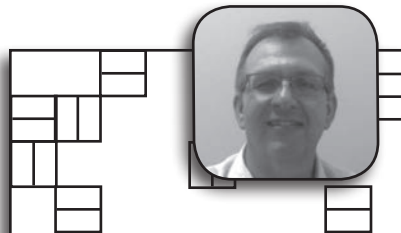
"Our clients' goals are often abandoned prematurely prior to considering the use of adaptive technology."

Historically, training in AT and related equipment/devices has not been offered as a core focus in many vocational rehabilitation programs, therefore adopting a collaborative approach with qualified therapists who have experience working with AT should be encouraged. This approach will allow the vocational evaluator/counsellor and client to better explore possible adaptations and/or options that might minimize limitations and increase employment related success and sustainability and ultimately become integrated in to the evaluating professional's 'tool box' when working with clients of different physical and/or cognitive challenges.

Keep in mind that AT is comprised of devices that increase function, independence, participation, and productivity for people with disabilities, as well as the services needed for using these devices. AT can range from easy-to-obtain and inexpensive products like electric staplers to sophisticated, specialized adaptations for computer access. There are many AT solutions that can assist in a variety of occupations and

workplaces. Newer technologies such as smart phones and tablets devices (and related apps) are also wonderful tools that not only help clients, but make them look tech-savvy in front of would-be employers.

There are several resources throughout Canada and North America that vocational evaluators and rehabilitation counsellors can refer to in order to build upon their knowledge and implementation of AT resources and professionals. While collaborating with the likes of occupational therapists (OTs) and speech language pathologists (SLPs) is a good start, incorporating the services of assistive technology professionals (ATPs) and/or rehabilitation engineers might also be beneficial. Many of these individuals can be found on the Rehabilitation Engineering and Assistive Technology Society of North America (RESNA) website or by simply contacting your local qualified rehabilitation therapists/clinics. It is through our ongoing collaboration with many other professionals that we are best able to assist our clients meet their vocational goals. ☺



Gregory Staub attended Edinboro University of Pennsylvania where he has earned his BA in speech therapy and an MA in vocational rehabilitation counselling. He has spent over 17 years working with individuals with disabilities who have had a wide range of needs with a focus on assistive technology. He has recently joined Vocational Alternatives, Inc., a vocational rehab firm offering a host of assessment and rehabilitation services to the medical, insurance and legal communities.

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