

# CAVEWAS Corner

## A Japanese Perspective on Vocational Rehabilitation

By Francois Paradis, MA, CVE

I have been actively involved in the field of vocational rehabilitation in Toronto for more than 12 years and have a keen interest in improving my skills and knowledge of vocational assessment. Being self-employed has made the process challenging, as there are fewer opportunities to learn from others when working in isolation. This is why I enjoy discussing the challenges of our profession with colleagues whenever I have opportunities. I am always interested in learning new approaches, tools, and methods that could make my work more effective. With that goal in mind, I was fortunate to have the opportunity and privilege of visiting a vocational rehabilitation centre in Japan to witness firsthand their approach to vocational rehabilitation. The purpose of this article is to relate what I have witnessed and to contrast it with my own experience of vocational assessment.

### My experience in Canada

Since I began my career as a vocational evaluator, I have worked in both the non-profit and for-profit sectors. I have been primarily involved with the Ontario Workers' Compensation system, the Ontario Disability Support Program and the health/auto insurance sector and have witnessed a variety of vocational rehabilitation approaches. There are a few points in common that I have noticed:

- The above systems offer a decentralized approach to vocational rehabilitation. While intake, adjudication, and case management services are typically provided in house, various contractors are relied upon to provide

vocational rehabilitation services to people with disabilities. Such services may include medical assessments, vocational assessments, employment counseling, job search training, job coaching, etc. This type of system allows providers of vocational rehabilitation services to access the varied expertise of contractors and their objectivity.

- In the vocational assessment process, evaluators are expected to follow an objective and rigorous methodology to evaluate the employability of people with disabilities. Objective medical evidence must be taken into account, along with the results of standardized tests, which are compared to data provided by occupational classifications in terms of aptitudes, physical demands, and interests.
- Vocational evaluators provide employment recommendations but are typically not involved in the implementation of the vocational rehabilitation services they recommend. Services such as academic skills upgrading, vocational skills training, job search training or job coaching are usually implemented by other providers and rehabilitation professionals at a later stage.
- These vocational rehabilitation programs are meant to be client driven and tailored to the needs, potential, and vocational interests of each individual.



### Vocational rehabilitation in Japan

According to the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare (MHLW), there are about 7.88 million people with disabilities in Japan, among an approximate population of 127 million. These are divided into the categories of physical, intellectual, and mental/psychiatric disabilities.

The Japanese government's primary measure to promote competitive employment for people with disabilities is the so-called Quota-Levy and Grant system. Based on this system, private companies with 200 employees or more (100 employees or more as of April 2015) are required to have a minimum of two per cent of employees with disabilities. Public companies have a quota of 2.3 per cent. This is a "stick and carrot" system, whereas employers failing to meet their quota are required to pay a fine of ¥50,000 (approximately \$535) per month per employee below quota. Part of the monies levied is utilized to provide financial support to employers meeting their quota requirements. These grants may be used by employers to partially cover their costs incurred to hire or continue to employ persons with

### 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.

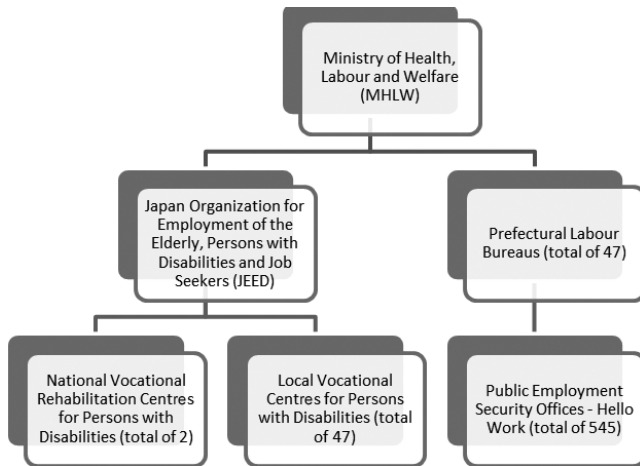
**Enjoy!**

### CAVEWAS National Board Of Directors

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: Jodi Webster at [jodi@keyrehabservices.ca](mailto:jodi@keyrehabservices.ca) We also encourage you to join our group on LinkedIn.

disabilities. The employment rate of persons with disabilities in private companies has slowly but steadily increased, from 1.47 per cent in 2002 to 1.69 per cent in 2012. Although the two per cent target has not yet been reached, the trend suggests that the Quota-Levy and Grant system is an effective measure.

Japan has also put in place a complex structure of services designed to facilitate training and employment for people with disabilities. The following is a partial organizational chart:



People with disabilities seeking employment can access vocational rehabilitation services through public employment security offices (Hello Work), local vocational centres (one in each of Japan's 47 prefectures), or at one of the two national vocational rehabilitation centres.

This article will focus on the National Vocational Rehabilitation Centre located in Saitama, Japan, where I was offered a tour of the facilities and services as well as meetings with the staff.

## The National Rehabilitation Centre in Saitama, Japan

On November 8, 2012, I visited the National Rehabilitation Centre for Persons with Disabilities (NRC), which is located in the district of Tokorozawa, Saitama prefecture. I was accompanied by two facilitators and interpreters. This rehabilitation centre is very large (225,180 Sq m, or about the size of 35 American football fields) and is comprised of several departments, including;

- A clinic providing physical rehabilitation services
- A research institute
- A college providing training programs to future rehabilitation professionals
- A vocational rehabilitation centre (NVRCD) offering vocational evaluations, employment counselling and skill training programs for people with disabilities
- Sports facilities and dormitories for participants with disabilities

We were first greeted at the centre by Ms. Yoko Nishimura, chief of international cooperation of

NRC, who first offered us a tour of the physical rehabilitation facilities. One area is dedicated to the physical rehabilitation of people with physical disabilities and those who have sustained post traumatic injuries, including traumatic brain injuries. Rehabilitation services are provided by occupational therapists, physiotherapists, and by other professionals with relevant qualifications.

The tour followed with a visit of the pre-vocational training department, which offers programs for

applicants that need to develop their work readiness skills. One such facility is the simulated laundry group training program, which primarily targets people with intellectual and mental disabilities. Under the guidance of vocational instructors, participants learn how to launder, press, and fold cloth. We also visited an area where participants are trained to work in the retail sector to stock shelves, perform inventory control, and provide customer

service. Another area provided housekeeping training in a simulated hotel room environment. All simulated work environments were very realistic but unfortunately, I was not allowed to take pictures, for privacy reasons.

All participants acquire and/or accentuate their skills under the supervision and guidance of instructors. I had an opportunity to meet with several of these instructors and inquired as to their approach. They noted that the purpose of these pre-vocational programs is to nurture proper work attitudes, to provide participants with basic work skills, communications skills and to evaluate their performance and progress. At this stage, a proper work attitude and motivation are more important than work performance. To achieve these goals, instructors provide a close mentor-trainee relationship to foster trust.

Following our visit of the pre-vocational training department, we had lunch at the cafeteria, which employs people with disabilities. I noted that I was served in a timely fashion and provided with good customer service.

## The National Vocational Rehabilitation Centre for Persons with Disabilities (NVRCD)

Our afternoon visit was dedicated to the vocational rehabilitation centre and included a Q&A session with the head of the NVRCD. This facility is a division of the larger NRC but is quite extensive in itself. The NVRCD can accept

about 200 trainees and offers programs that are typically one year in length. The following vocational training programs are primarily aimed at people with physical disabilities:

- Mechatronics programs (mechanical engineering design, electronic engineering design as well as assembly and inspection)
- Business administration and information technology (e.g. Business accounting, office administration, desktop publishing, software developing, web design)
- Design programs (interior design, architectural CAD)
- Massage therapy, shiatsu, acupuncture, and moxibustion training programs are also offered to people with visual disabilities to prepare them for employment as physical therapists

NVRCD also has a job development section that offers programs designed for people with mental and developmental disabilities. This section provides the following courses:

- Assembly work course: participants receive training on assembly, inspection, and various light tasks in a manufacturing setting
- Office work course: this include training on basic operation of computers and the acquisition of skills and relevant clerical work, such as data entry, document management, mail sorting, and delivery
- Product distribution and retail course: trainees acquire knowledge and skills related to product distribution, including retrieving products from storage areas, inspecting products, processing of payment slips and distribution. Trainees also acquire skills relevant to the retail sector, including product display, packaging, packing, and inventory control.

Each program provides vocational instruction and hands-on training in realistic simulated work environments. The ratio is about five trainees per instructor and therefore, each participant receives a lot of individual attention. Instructors also help their trainees to find and maintain employment by acting as job developers and by negotiating accommodations or job modifications with employers. Training programs are adjusted to the specific needs of employers and to the characteristics of each trainee, which helps promote a smoother transition into the workforce. The vocational instructors I spoke to indicated that employers are motivated to hire people with disabilities, not only because of employment quotas but also to improve their public image as socially responsible companies. I was informed that the work placement rate is generally over 80 per cent, with a majority of graduates finding competitive employment.

Employment retention is facilitated by vocational instructors, who are familiar with their students and who meet regularly with employers to discuss potential issues and to negotiate appropriate accommodations at work. Job coaching services are also provided to employees with disabilities to ease their workplace integration and to monitor their progress and performance.

## Admission and Vocational Assessment

People with disabilities typically apply at the NVRCD through their local Hello Work office and must provide a disability certificate completed by a medical doctor. Graduates of pre-vocational programs offered by the NRCD may also apply.

As part of their admission process, applicants undergo an extensive vocational assessment over a period of one week. The purpose of the vocational assessment is two-fold: to determine which applicants are suitable for NVRCD's vocational rehabilitation services and to match each applicant with the appropriate vocational training program. Applicants with intellectual or mental disabilities tend to be referred for more physically demanding employment such as laundry work, warehousing, assembly, or cleaning. Applicants with physical disabilities tend to be referred for sedentary work in the IT, business administration, and design sectors. People with visual impairments may be referred for physical therapy programs.

As indicated below, the vocational assessment process differs according to the type of disability:

### Applicants with Physical Disabilities

- Day 1 Intake interview and initial evaluation of aptitudes (Japanese version of GATB); test of Japanese literacy
- Day 2 Test of mathematic skills; counselling session to review initial test results and to identify in which program candidate hopes to enroll (only for candidates who passed the initial evaluation)
- Day 3, 4, 5 Situational assessments tailored to the training program in which the candidate wishes to enroll; interview by training instructors (day 4)
- Day 6 Follow-up session with vocational assessor for final determination of acceptance and for program selection

### Applicants with Intellectual or Mental Disabilities

- Day 1 Intake interview and initial evaluation of aptitudes (Japanese version of GATB); test of Japanese literacy; test of mathematic skills

- Day 2 Counselling session to review initial test results and to identify in which program the candidate hopes to enroll (only for candidates who passed the initial evaluation). Situational assessment to assess potential productivity issues such as work tolerance and concentration.
- Day 3 Individual consultation
- Day 4, 5, 6 Situational assessments tailored to the training program in which the candidates wish to enroll; interview by training instructors (day 5)
- Day 7 Work trial in simulated work environment. The candidate's ability to work in a group is also evaluated.
- Day 8 Follow-up session with vocational assessor for final determination of acceptance and for program selection

As outlined above, the vocational assessment does include some psychometric testing, but emphasizes the use of situational assessments to evaluate a person's employability and for program matching purpose. Counselling and interview sessions with vocational evaluators and vocational instructors are also important to help the applicant explore the various training options offered at the facility. Applicants that are not deemed ready for employment may be referred to pre-vocational training programs offered at the NRCD or to other pre-vocational services agencies.

I had the opportunity to interview one of the vocational evaluators there and was told that vocational evaluators/counsellors rely more heavily on their experience and judgment to assign applicants to the appropriate training program rather than basing their decision on the results of standardized tests. This is in part due to the fact that many applicants do not perform well on psychometric tests, such as the GATB, due to their disabilities, and as such, situational assessments and counselling are considered more reliable methods of assessing employment potential. Additionally, Japan's occupational classification system is mainly designed for statistical and general counselling purposes and as such, it does not provide information on aptitude requirements or physical demands, as the Canadian NOC does. Therefore, standardized test results cannot be directly compared to the Japanese occupational classification.

## Impressions

In my opinion, NRCD's system has the following strengths:

- A comprehensive and centralized system of service delivery is offered. Each step

of the program is quite well integrated, which promotes effective feedback among rehabilitation professionals at various stages of the vocational rehabilitation process, from admission to employment.

- Vocational instructors are the key strength of this system as they follow students from initial training to employment and nurture a positive relations with potential employers
- There is a strong partnership between the rehabilitation centre and employers. The Quota-Levy and Grant system acts as an incentive for employers. However, corporate social responsibility also appears to be an incentive and this may be a factor typical of the Japanese culture.
- There is a strong emphasis on post-employment services through provision of counselling services for employers, job accommodation, and job coaching services for employees with disabilities

Some limitations of NRCD's system may include:

- A lack of flexibility; applicants must choose among a limited number of training programs
- The rehabilitation centre gets to choose who is accepted. Rejected applicants are referred out.
- NRCD offers an "all-inclusive" service model that is costly. Situational assessments tend to be resource intensive and time-consuming. This centralised approach requires a high degree of coordination, planning, and monitoring and may create a limitation on the number of applicants the centre can accept (about 200 per year).

I provided in this article a brief overview of Japanese government policies and the vocational rehabilitation services provided by the NRCD. In my opinion, there are a few lessons that can be learned from the Japanese approach to vocational rehabilitation.

- In Canada, several providers of vocational rehabilitation services favor a decentralized approach. They would benefit from implementing stronger communication channels between various rehabilitation professionals, which would help increase the effectiveness of services provided.
- In spite of their added cost, situational assessments and work trials would be an effective supplemental tool to vocational assessments in identifying suitable employment options for people with disabilities.

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