

Office of Vocational Rehabilitation: Early Reach Initiative

"What do you want to be when you grow up?" This is a question many of us were asked as we were growing up. For youth with disabilities, often this is a daunting question filled with uncertainty and lack of information.

In order to assist youth with disabilities, better prepare for their transition into the world of work and independence, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) has started a new initiative called **"Early Reach"**. Early Reach is an outreach initiative intended to promote successful outcomes for youth with disabilities by increasing awareness of OVR services and the benefits of early career planning. The initiative adds an **Early Reach Coordinator** to the rehabilitation team in OVR's fifteen district offices.

The Early Reach Coordinator will reach out to youth with disabilities, their parents, local schools and community agencies that serve youth. The purpose of this outreach is to connect with youth with disabilities early, beginning at age 14, so that they know more about OVR services and can better prepare for vocational choices and living independently. In addition, Early Reach Coordinators will be knowledgeable about other services that are available to youth with disabilities who are transitioning from school to adult life.



Photo of Early Reach Coordinator:

L to R Back: Sarah Vogel, Erin Lohr, Kim Golding, Stacy Shirk, Hillary Hubbell, LaRonda Moorefield, Stephanie Shuler
L to R Front: Mary Jane Saras, Melissa Demchak, Amanda Smith, Jill Grossberg, Holly Stapleton

OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

NORRISTOWN DISTRICT OFFICE

Welcome to the Early Reach Initiative!

Primary Services offered to Community Members:

- ◆ Early Outreach, Education & Advocacy for youth with disabilities as early as age 14.
- ◆ Community Workshops, Presentations, & Consultations are offered to increase awareness about OVR.
- ◆ Provide resources to prepare youth, families, schools & community organizations with the transition process.
- ◆ Collaborate & coordinate with youth to successfully navigate the transition from high school to the workforce.

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
PLEASE CONTACT:**

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Early Reach Coordinator
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"Helping Our Youth Reach Their Potential"
By: Evelyn Gardiner



pennsylvania

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR & INDUSTRY
OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Overview

Group Outreach:

- Informational presentations and consultation to school personnel, community agencies, youth with disabilities and families to outline the services offered by the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR).
- Education and consultation on the benefits of early career planning and the development of independent living skills.

Individual Outreach:

- Assistance for youth with disabilities in planning for and making application to OVR for services.
- Consultation and linkages to resources that will assist youth with disabilities pursue participation in the workforce and independence.

| District Office | Counties Served | Early Reach Coordinator | Phone | Email |
|---------------------|--|-------------------------|------------------------|--|
| DuBois | Cameron, Clearfield, Elk, Jefferson, McKean | VACANT | | |
| Harrisburg | Cumberland, Dauphin, Juniata, Lebanon, Mifflin, Perry | Stacy Shirk | 717-346-2783 | stshirk@pa.gov |
| Norristown | Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery | Stephanie Shuler | 484-250-4340 ext. 161 | sshuler@pa.gov |
| Philadelphia | Philadelphia | Jill Grossberg | 215-560-4193 | jgrossberg@pa.gov |
| Wilkes-Barre | Bradford, Columbia, Lackawanna, Luzerne, Pike, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Wayne, Wyoming | Mary Jane Saras | 570-826-2011 ext. 110 | msaras@pa.gov |
| Allentown | Carbon, Lehigh, Monroe, Northampton | LaRonda Moorefield | 610-821-6441 | lmoorefiel@pa.gov |
| Altoona | Bedford, Blair, Centre, Fulton, Huntingdon | Holly Stapleton | 814-946-6994 | hostapleto@pa.gov |
| Erie | Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Forest, Mercer, Venango, Warren | Hillary Hubbell | 814-651-9000 | hhubbell@pa.gov |
| Pittsburgh | Allegheny | Sarah Vogel | 412-392-5973 | svogel@pa.gov |
| Washington | Fayette, Greene, Washington | Amanda Smith | 724-223-4430 ext. 238 | amandsmith@pa.gov |
| York | Adams, Franklin, Lancaster, York | Erin Lohr | 717-771-4407 ext. 241 | elohr@pa.gov |
| Johnstown | Cambria, Indiana, Somerset, Westmoreland | Joni Henry | 814-255-6771 ext. 3046 | jonihenry@pa.gov |
| New Castle | Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Lawrence | John (Cliff) Hultquist | 724-656-3217 | jhultquist@pa.gov |
| Reading | Berks, Schuylkill | Andrea Merrick | 610-621-5800 ext. 117 | amerrick@pa.gov |
| Williamsport | Clinton, Lycoming, Montour, Northumberland, Potter, Snyder, Tioga, Union | Deanna Trick | 570-505-7220 ext. 131 | detrick@pa.gov |

Questions can be directed to the **OVR Early Reach initiative Manager: Michele Bornman**

Phone: 717-787-6005 or Email: mbornman@pa.gov

transportation, employment training and support, assistive technology and personal support services, health, prevention and wellness, financial management and administrative services, legal fees, expenses for oversight and monitoring, funeral and burial expenses, and other expenses, which are approved by the Secretary of the Treasury under regulations.

- **Tax treatment** - Earnings on an ABLE account and distributions from the account for qualified disability expenses do not count as taxable income of the contributor or the eligible beneficiary. Contributions to an ABLE account must be made in cash from the contributor's after-tax income.
- **Roll-Overs** - Assets in an ABLE account may be rolled over without penalty into another ABLE account for either the designated beneficiary (for instance, when moving to another state) or any of the beneficiary's qualifying family members.

Federal Treatment of ABLE Account Under Means-Tested Programs, Including Supplemental Security Income & Medicaid:

- **Means-Tested Programs generally** - Assets in an ABLE account and distributions from the account for qualified disability expenses would be disregarded when determining the designated beneficiary's eligibility for most federal means-tested benefits.
- **Supplemental Security Income (SSI):** For SSI, only the first \$100,000 in an ABLE account will be disregarded. Assets above \$100,000 will count as resources under SSI. In addition, if the designated beneficiary's ABLE account balance exceeds \$100,000, the individual's SSI benefits will not be terminated, but instead will be suspended until such time as the individual's resources fall below \$100,000. Further, it is intended that distributions expended for housing purposes will receive the same treatment which all housing costs paid by outside sources receive.
- **Medicaid Eligibility:** A beneficiary will not lose eligibility for Medicaid based on the assets held in their ABLE account, even during the time that SSI benefits are suspended (as described above for an account with over \$100,000).
- **Medicaid Payback Provision:** Subject to certain limits and upon the state's filing of a claim for payment, any assets remaining in an ABLE account upon the death of the qualified beneficiary must be used to reimburse the state for Medicaid payments it made on behalf of the beneficiary. The amount of any Medicaid payback is calculated based on amounts paid by Medicaid after the creation of the ABLE Account and shall exclude amounts paid by the beneficiary as premiums to a Medicaid buy-in program.

How Soon Will ABLE Accounts Be Available?

- **Federal Regulations:** The Secretary of the Treasury is required to issue regulations or other necessary guidance within six months of enactment of the law, which would require such regulations and/or guidance to be available by mid-June 2015.
- **State Decisions:** Each state will need to decide whether to offer a qualified ABLE program to its residents, and, if so, the state will need to decide whether the program will be state-run; whether to select another entity, such as a financial services firm, to run the program; or whether to contract with another state to allow its own residents to use the qualified ABLE program of another state.