



**VA**  
**HEALTH**  
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Defining  
**EXCELLENCE**  
in the 21st Century

# VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICE HANDBOOK

Revised 10/08/2020

Michael E. DeBakey Veteran Affairs Medical Center



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## Mission of the MEDVAMC

- To fulfill President Lincoln's promise "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan" by serving and honoring the men and women who are America's veterans.

### ~ VA CORE VALUES ~

Integrity, **C**ommitment, **A**dvocacy, **R**espect, **E**xcellence ("I CARE")

- **Integrity:** Act with high moral principle. Adhere to the highest professional standards. Maintain the trust and confidence of all with whom I engage.
- **Commitment:** Work diligently to serve Veterans and other beneficiaries. Be driven by an earnest belief in VA's mission. Fulfill my individual responsibilities and organizational responsibilities.
- **Advocacy:** Be truly Veteran-centric by identifying, fully considering, and appropriately advancing the interests of Veterans and other beneficiaries.
- **Respect:** Treat all those I serve and with whom I work with dignity and respect. Show respect to earn it.
- **Excellence:** Strive for the highest quality and continuous improvement. Be thoughtful and decisive in leadership, accountable for my actions, willing to admit mistakes, and rigorously correct them.

Promotion of value in the programs and services offered

- Our *commitment* is to Veterans by being responsive, *respectful*, *trustworthy* & *compassionate*.
- Working as a team to provide *excellence* in patient care, research & education.
- Accurate data and information for decision making as we practice good stewardship of resources while incorporating new & innovative ways to stay at the forefront of health care delivery.
- Effective and timely communications.
- Relationships with our veterans, staff, union partnership, volunteers, academic affiliates, and corporate body.
- Diversity, dignity, and the contributions of every member of our staff and volunteers.
- An ethics-based framework for business and clinical decision making.
- The discovery of new knowledge through research.

## **~ VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICE (VRS) ~**

### **Program History**

Houston MEDVAMC Veterans Industries program was organized in the mid-1970s. Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS) Program began in 1994 and was staffed by Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation and Psychology Services, but since 2001, the VRS program operates under the Mental Health Care Line.

### **~ MISSION OF VRS ~**

The mission of VHA Vocational Rehabilitation Service is to promote recovery for Veterans living with mental illness or physical impairment, with barriers to employment, who want to secure and maintain meaningful community-based competitive employment that fosters self-esteem, dignity, respect, and independence through high-quality vocational rehabilitation services.

### **~ TARGET POPULATION ~**

VHA Vocational Rehabilitation Service is appropriate for all Veterans eligible for VA health care living with mental illness or physical impairment with barriers to employment and want to secure and maintain meaningful community-based competitive employment. VHA Vocational Rehabilitation is intended for Veterans with mental illness, substance use disorders, homelessness, criminal justice involvement, physical disabilities, and other disabilities that contribute to occupational dysfunction.

### **~ VISION OF VRS ~**

All Veterans will be given a chance to improve their quality of life through optimum use of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

### **~ GOALS FOR VRS ~**

Our goal is to assist Veterans in evaluating their employment future, identifying their strengths and weaknesses, and guiding them through to a successful vocational adjustment by:

- Returning Veterans to competitive employment in the local community
- Providing extensive vocational assessments
- Improving pre-vocational skills (through adhering to a work schedule, working cooperatively with others, accepting supervision from leadership)
- Reducing psychiatric and physical symptoms
- Preventing hospitalization
- Improving self-esteem and enhancing the quality of life

- Job retention
- Treatment team integration

**~ STAFF INTRODUCTIONS ~**

**Dwayne Adams**  
**Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor** **713-470-8646**

Mr. Adams works in Compensated Work Therapy-Enriched Transitional Work (CWT-ETW) program. He case manages Veterans in the Work- for- Pay program.

**Clifton Charles, M.A.**  
**Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor**  
**Supported Employment Counselor** **713-705-9589**

Mr. Charles works in Compensated Work Therapy-Supported Employment (CWT-SE) program. He facilitates the placement of Veterans with Poly-Trauma into community employment.

**Veronica Comeaux, M.S., C.R.C.**  
**Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor**  
**Supported Employment Counselor** **281-536-4415**

Ms. Comeaux works in Compensated Work Therapy-Supported Employment (CWT-SE) program. She facilitates the placement of Veterans with serious mental illness into community employment.

**Joseph Edwards, Jr., M.S**  
**Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor**  
**Supported Employment Specialist & Mentor Trainer** **713-248-3302**

Mr. Edwards works in Compensated Work Therapy-Supported Employment (CWT-SE) program. He facilitates the placement of Veterans with serious mental illness into community employment. Mr. Edwards is also the Mentor Site Trainer for CWT-SE for VISN 16.

**Herman Frazier Jr., B.S.**  
**Vocational Rehabilitation Program Lead** **281-687-6303**  
**713-791-1414 X 24449**

Mr. Frazier is responsible for the coordination of the VRS CWT-SE-CBES-ETW program and Financial Operations.

**Deonte Grant, M.R.C, C.R.C.**  
**Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor**

**281-787-8170**

Mr. Grant works in Community Based Supported Employment. He facilitates placement of Veterans into community employment.

**Rachel Lasich, M. Ed, C.R.C.**  
**Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor**  
**Supported Employment Counselor**

**346-217-3149**

Ms. Lasich works in Compensated Work Therapy-Supported Employment (CWT-SE) program. She facilitates the placement of Veterans with serious mental illness into community employment.

**LaDonna Latham, M.S, C.R.C.**  
**Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor**

**713-791-1414 X 22311**

Ms. Latham works in Compensated Work Therapy-Enriched Transitional Work (CWT-ETW) program. She case manages Veterans in the Work- for Pay- program.

**Charles Miles, M.A.**  
**Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor**

**713-794-7437**

Mr. Miles is responsible for the daily operations of the Enriched Transitional Work (ETW) program. He is responsible for Veteran work assignments in the Work -for- Pay program.

**Velora Thomas, M.A., B.S., C.T.R.**  
**Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor**

**832-703-7483**

Ms. Mooney works in Compensated Work Therapy-Supported Employment (CWT-SE) program. She facilitates the placement of Veterans with serious mental illness into community employment.

**Calvin Peyton, M.S., C.R.C.**  
**Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor**

**713-775-1695**

Mr. Peyton works in Community Based Supported Employment. He facilitates the placement of Veterans into community employment.

**Anthony Samuel, M.S., M.A.**  
**Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor**  
**Supported Employment Counselor**

**281-770-8520**

Mr. Samuel works in Compensated Work Therapy - Community Based Employment Services (CWT-CBES). He facilitates the placement of Veterans into community employment.

**Melva Washington, M.B.A., C.J.C.D.C., C.J.C.T.C.**  
**Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor**  
**Supported Employment Counselor**

**832-833-1609**

Ms. Washington works in Compensated Work Therapy - Community Based Employment Services (CWT-CBES). She facilitates the placement of Veterans into community employment.

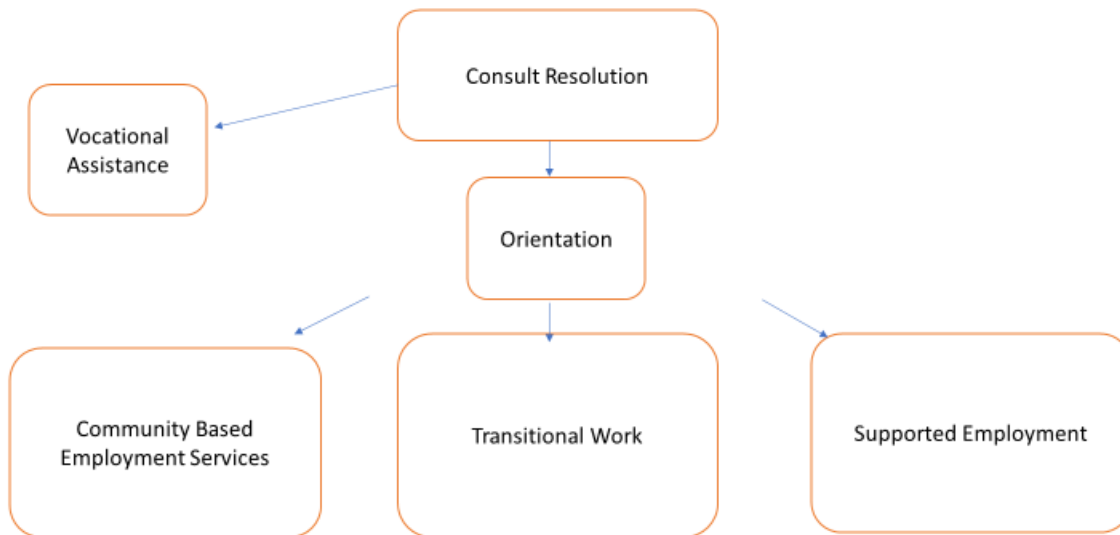
**Avis Williams, B.A.**  
**Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor**

**713-471-2763**

Ms. Williams Latham works in Compensated Work Therapy-Enriched Transitional Work (CWT-ETW) program. She case manages Veterans in the Work- for- Pay program.

~ ACCESS TO VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SECTION ~

## Vocational Rehabilitation Services





## **~ CRITERIA FOR ACCEPTANCE ~**

A MEDVAMC licensed health provider refers to eligible Veterans for VA services to VRS.

Veterans need to have as their goal to seek competitive employment in order to be referred to VRS.

Veterans with active, serious mental illness (including Schizophrenia, Psychoses, and Bipolar Disorder) are eligible for Supported Employment services.

Veterans who do not have an active serious mental illness are eligible for Community Based Employment Services (CBES) Program or Enriched Transitional Work (ETW) Program

This program is provided at NO COST TO VETERAN.

PARTICIPATION IN THIS PROGRAM IS VOLUNTARY.

## **~ VETERAN'S RIGHTS ~**

Veterans' Health Administration (VHA) employees will respect and support your rights as a Veteran. VHA is pleased you have selected us to provide your health care. VHA plans to make your experience as pleasant for you as possible. Your basic rights and responsibilities are outlined below.

Please talk with VA treatment team members or a patient representative if you have any questions or would like more information about your rights.

### **RESPECT AND NON-DISCRIMINATION**

- You will be treated with dignity, compassion, and respect as an individual.
- Your privacy will be protected.
- You will receive care in a safe environment.
- We will seek to honor your personal and religious values.
- In order to provide a safe treatment environment for all patients and staff, you are asked to respect other patients and staff, and to follow facility rules. Avoid unsafe acts that place others at risk for accidents or injuries. Please, immediately, report any condition you believe to be unsafe.

## **INFORMATION DISCLOSURE AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

- ◆ You will be given information about your health benefits. The information will be provided in a way that you can understand.
- ◆ Your medical record will be kept confidential. Information about you will not be released without your consent unless authorized by law (i.e., state public health reporting). You have the right to information in your medical record and may request a copy of your records by contacting the Release of Information.

## **PARTICIPATION IN TREATMENT DECISIONS**

- ◆ You, and any person(s) you choose, will be involved in all decisions about your services.
- ◆ You are encouraged to ask questions when you do not understand something about your services. This will help us provide the best possible care to you.
- ◆ You will be included in resolving any ethical issues about your care. You may consult with MEDVAMC's Ethics Committee and/or other staff knowledgeable about health care ethics.
- ◆ If you or the MEDVAMC believe that you have been neglected, abused, or exploited, you will receive help.

## **COMPLAINT PROCESS**

Our goal is to give excellent customer service, and we know that you may occasionally have questions or concerns. Written notification of actions are available when requested. Lodging a complaint will in no way compromise your medical care or your right to future treatment. All parties will comply with VHA policies and procedures regarding patient rights. To find solutions to your concerns, please take the following steps:

### **Level 1**

Discuss your concerns first with the staff person with whom you have concerns or with your VRS Case Manager, ETW Program Manager, or with your elected Veterans' Representative (who will talk with VRS staff on your behalf).

***If not resolved, go to Level 2.***

### **Level 2**

Discuss your concerns with your VRS Lead, Mr. Herman Frazier, at X 24449 or 281-687-6303. Mr. Frazier should be able to respond to you within two (2) working days. If you believe your concern has not been addressed, you can request to meet with Dr. Jill McGavin, Acting VRS Program Director, 713-794-7058.

***If not resolved, go to Level 3.***

**Level 3**

Notify Dr. Jill McGavin that you wish to go to the next level. She will direct you to an available and appropriate executive-level staff. This Executive should be able to respond to you within five (5) working days.

**~ VETERAN'S RESPONSIBILITIES ~**

Your compliance with the following list of responsibilities is necessary to ensure the highest quality care. It shows the importance of your contribution to your care. You are responsible for:

- Cooperating with your treatment team and bringing concerns about your care to them.
- Following safety rules and posted signs.
- Being considerate and respectful to all staff and fellow Veterans.
- Preventing harm to yourself, to other Veterans, and to staff by your actions. Refraining from bringing any weapons on-site and from using any abusive language or behavior.
- Alerting staff when another Veteran is having difficulty.
- Not interfering with the treatment of other Veterans.
- Attending all your scheduled appointments on time.

*If you have any questions regarding these rights and responsibilities, please contact VRS staff or the Consumers Affairs Office at 713-791-1414 X 27884*

Advocates or other assistance are available upon request. Disability Rights TX is available for intake appointments Monday through Friday 9 am – 12:30 pm. Call 713-974-7691, 1-800-880-0821 or visit their website @ [www.disabilityrightstx.org](http://www.disabilityrightstx.org).

## ~ PROGRAM DESCRIPTION ~

Vocational Rehabilitation programs provide high quality, easily accessible services to eligible veterans with physical and/or psychiatric disabilities.

**VRS** work therapy programs start with vocational assessments. Work hardening, job readiness training, and job search activities are available to all veterans who enter the program. Gainful employment, increased independence, and enhanced self-esteem are all examples of positive outcomes achieved by veterans who participate in COMPENSATED WORK THERAPY programs.

Staff works in conjunction with VA staff, including the veteran's primary care clinician, to ensure that other important needs are met. These could include transportation, housing, medical treatment, and disability compensation, to mention a few. All Veterans enrolled in Vocational Rehabilitation Programs are assigned a Case Manager and develop a treatment plan with their Case Manager. Case Managers will assist in the coordination of services. This may include talking with in-hospital work-site supervisors, counselors, and medical personnel in the Veteran's clinical program, as necessary.

**Discharge Planning** involves meeting with your Case Manager and participating in assessing your readiness for independent and successful functioning in the community. Your effort and progress toward finding competitive employment are reviewed along with your progress toward meeting other identified goals of your treatment plan. The target completion date for VRS Program is set in discussion between you and VRS staff. Discharge planning is an ongoing process and begins the day you start CWT.

Vocational Rehabilitation Programs Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) programs include:

- Vocational Assistance
- Community-Based Employment Services (CWT-CBES)
- Compensated Work Therapy/Supported Employment (CWT-SE)
- Enriched Transitional Work (CWT-ETW)

### Vocational Assistance

Vocational Assistance provides help in determining vocational needs/goals. These sessions can also include resume assistance and referrals to possible employers.

Vocational Rehabilitation Specialists can also facilitate referrals to VR&E, TWC-VRS, Texas Veterans Commission, and other community groups depending on eligibility.

### **Community-Based Employment Services (CWT-CBES)**

Community-Based Employment Services (CBES) provides individual flexible vocational support designed for each Veteran based on their strengths, interests, and support needs. Veterans are offered community-based employment support tailored to each Veteran, providing a level of support necessary to secure and maintain competitive employment in their local communities. Veterans are eligible for CBES if: (1) The Veteran is eligible for CWT services, (2) The Veterans immediate vocational goal is to work in a competitive, community-based job (3) The Veteran has a history of sporadic employment, difficulty maintaining a job, difficulty initiating and following through on their job search, or is not able to obtain competitive work independently.

### **Compensated Work Therapy/Supported Employment (CWT-SE)**

CWT/SE is designed to help Veterans with serious mental illness, such as Schizophrenia, Bipolar Disorder, and other psychoses, and seek and maintain employment within the community. CWT/SE specializes in developing veterans' opportunities to work at their highest level based on individual strengths, abilities, and preferences. We provide Veterans with Severe Mental Illness (SMI), Traumatic Brain Injury, the following:

- Individualized evidenced-based supported employment services
- Expanded mental health outreach and awareness
- Inclusion of stakeholders (family, employers, community support) in veterans' services
- Provision of services in the Veterans communities
- Reduced stigma for Veterans with SMI in the world of work

### **What is Supported Employment - SE?**

According to the federal definition, supported employment means "competitive work in integrated work settings . . . consistent with the strengths, recourses, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice of the individuals, for individuals with the most significant disabilities for whom competitive employment has not traditionally occurred; or for whom competitive employment has been interrupted or intermittent as a result of a significant disability"

Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998:  
Title IV of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998  
Pub Law 105-220, 112 Stat 936

## **PROGRAM EXPECTATIONS OF PARTICIPANTS**

- You may withdraw from SE services at any time, as this is a voluntary program.
- Treatment Plans: A vocational assessment plan (VAP) and strategic employment plan (SEP) is an important part of our work with you.
- We will talk with you at length about your past work experiences, education level, legal problems, mental health issues, likes and dislikes about jobs, your employment goals and desires, and many other issues. You and SE staff and the interdisciplinary team can develop a treatment plan that helps identify goals and steps needed to find employment.
- If you would like your family to be involved in developing this plan, please let us know, and we will be happy to involve them.
- Health & Safety: If you are injured on your job, you will follow your employer's guidelines and standards for reporting and treatment of on the job injuries, just as any other employee would do. You should also contact your Employment Specialist and inform him/her about any injuries at work-site. Your Employment Specialist will track this information and address any changes that need to be implemented to improve our services. As a VA patient, you are entitled to medical care from the VA should you require it. Please follow all your employer's safety guidelines when you are working and exercise good judgment to prevent injuries

## **SE VETERANS MAY EXPECT THE FOLLOWING FROM STAFF**

- You will be assigned an Employment Specialist who will help you to determine and to implement your vocational goals. Your counselor will be designated early in your assignment and will help you develop a vocational rehabilitation plan that best supports your vocational needs and desires. Your involvement is an essential part of this planning process.
- SE staff members are available for appointments during working hours.
- Your confidentiality will be strictly maintained.
- SE staff will make every effort to help you solve problems that may occur related to you obtaining and maintaining employment.
- Your feedback and suggestions will be collected and reviewed.

## **SE COMPLETION / TERMINATION**

- Relocating outside of a 50-mile radius of MEDVAMC
- Veteran is no longer in need of SE and declines follow-up support
- Violent or threatening behavior towards staff
- Veteran no longer wants to work

## **CWT-SE Letter to Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)**

**A letter to be completed by CWT staff on behalf of participating veterans documenting participation in Veterans Health Administration (VHA) vocational program operated under auspices of 38 U.S.C. 1718 which may be entered into patient's medical record and sent to the VBA if veteran request and signs a Release of Information (ROI) to VBA.**

Veterans receiving Public Assistance benefits (such as food stamps) are responsible for informing the Department of Social Services about their participation in the CWT Supported Employment and about their earnings. Failure to do so may result in sanctions or civil/criminal actions.

CWT SE will provide income verification to governmental entitlement agencies who present a proper ROI and who have the legal authority to obtain this information.

If you have unmet prior financial obligations (such as child support, back taxes, etc.), it is your responsibility to contact the appropriate agency and work out a payment plan. If you do not do this, money that you receive could be garnished or frozen by a creditor(s). Contact your CWT SE staff for assistance, if necessary.

- Voluntary reporting of income:** CWT SE program will provide income information to legitimate organizations such as landlords or financial institutions only when a Veteran signs a proper and specific ROI.
- Guardianship:** CWT SE follows VA policies and procedures outlined regarding Principal Guardianship and Fiduciary Responsibilities. Any veteran under Guardianship of Estate and/or Person will have to follow stipulations and laws pertaining to their situation whether their estate is under VA's jurisdiction.

## **Compensated Work Therapy /Enriched Transitional Work (CWT/ETW)**

ETW positions are designed to reflect the realities of a competitive workplace. ETW Veterans will demonstrate enough motivation and responsible work behaviors to merit a job with greater responsibility, higher compensation, and reduced supervision. Veterans in ETW are assigned to perform special projects that have been established through agreements with the MEDVAMC.

Veterans work under direct MEDVAMC employee supervision and indirect ETW supervision. Veterans must be willing to seek competitive employment while working ETW. The goal of ETW is to assist you in finding employment.

**We Believe:**

We believe Veterans make the best employees.

**We Assist:**

We assist Veterans in developing specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and timely (SMART) employment goals based on their unique skills, abilities, and preferences.

**We Provide:**

We provide Veterans a bridge to competitive employment through temporary real work assignments at VA Medical Centers and local businesses in conjunction with job/career development, vocational skills training, advocacy, and collaboration with community partners.

**We Connect:**

We connect Enriched Transitional Work Veterans with businesses and organizations, offering Veterans and employers the support that makes the transition to competitive community employment successful.

**We Partner:**

We partner with our Veterans, providing individualized holistic services that improve their physical and mental health, financial and housing stability, and overall well-being.



### **What you may expect from the program:**

1. Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) ETW program staff is dedicated to working with you to meet your identified goals. Some services this program offers are:
  - Hands-on work in a work atmosphere.
  - Close supervision with immediate feedback.
  - Ongoing formal evaluations of your work performance.
  - Clinical staff to help you identify goals and methods of meeting these goals
2. Vocational Rehabilitation Staff is available to:
  - Discuss work opportunities in the local community.
  - To assist with the completion of job applications.
  - Referral to Texas Workforce Solutions or other appropriate agencies.
  - Referral other appropriate agencies for job placement assistance.

You are expected to be an active participant in this program. This means working with clinical staff on identifying personal goals, participating during groups, and providing regular feedback to staff about your needs and how we are doing on helping you meet them. You are expected to work on meeting the goals identified in your individual Strategic Employment Plan.

3. Veterans in ETW **are not considered employees** of the MEDVAMC but are veterans in a work-for-pay therapeutic program. Because of this, you are not due to the benefits of employees.
4. There are some things which could occur as a result of your participation in this program:
  - A. Regular notes on your progress will be written in the CPRS system. These notes are available to all your medical center providers.
  - B. If you fail to meet program requirements of attendance, program standards, etc., you may be suspended or discharged.

- C. Income earned is variable and cannot be depended on as a source for car payments, rent, loans, etc.
5. Veterans with physical limitations must disclose these limitations at intake. If you have a physical limitation, CWT will partner with you to provide reasonable accommodations.
  6. Most work assignments require some standing, walking, lifting, bending, etc.

I understand that accidents sometimes occur during CWT-ETW assignments. If I cause an injury of property damage during my CWT-ETW assignment, I may be held liable.

**Job Readiness Training** consists of fourteen topics to assist you in obtaining competitive employment. The modules are:

Part 1: Budgeting TW Earnings/Financial Planning

Part 2: Old Jobs: Problems Areas and Positive Areas

Part 3: What Skills Do You Have: Job-Related Skills, Transferable Skills, Adaptive skills, and Skills summary

Part 4: Completing an Employment Application

Part 5: Creating a Resume and Letters: Things to Avoid in Resume, Combination Resumes, Cover letters, and Thank you letters.

Part 6: Interviewing Do's and Don'ts of Interviewing, Preparation for the Interview and Soft skills training

Part 7: Answering Interview Questions

Part 8: Addressing Incarceration

Part 9: Calling All Jobs: How Useful is cold calling an employer?

Part 10: Networking/How to Access Community Partners in the Local Houston/Metro Area

Part 11: Job Fairs: How to get the most out of Local job fairs

Part 12: Where to Look for Employment

Part 13: You Have the Job: Now What? Completing a W-4, payroll deductions, work practices, insurances, and benefits, solving interpersonal conflicts on the job

Part 14: Summary/How to apply for VA Employment

These areas are addressed in your weekly TW case management meetings with your TW Case Manager.

### ~ **ETW MEETINGS** ~

All ETW veterans are required to attend the following meetings:

#### **Meetings:**

- **ETW Case Management Meeting:** TW Veterans meet with their assigned Case manager weekly for individual and group sessions at designated

locations. Failure to attend Case management group and individual sessions will be grounds for program discharge.

Surveys: Semi-Annual Customer Satisfaction Surveys are available for you to provide suggestions and comments. Your suggestions will assist the COMPENSATED WORK THERAPY Staff in improving the program.

- **Community Meetings:** TW Veterans meet the 3rd Wednesday of every month from 1:00 pm to 2:00 pm, in Building 108 (Wellness Center). You are invited to comment on your care and to submit suggestions. Veterans are encouraged to use the "Suggestion Box," Community Meetings, and elected Veteran's Representative to comment on program activities. **Please note during COVID-19 Operation, ETW Community meetings are conducted via telecommunication.**
- **Veteran Treatment Meetings:** You must participate in your assigned treatment program to remain in the COMPENSATED WORK THERAPY program.
- You must attend your clinical appointments as a condition of your CWT involvement. Failure to do so can result in termination from the CWT program.
- You may request evening appointments, whenever possible, from your clinical programs to minimize interference with CWT work therapy.

### **~ ETW GENERAL INFORMATION ~**

**Daily Sign-in Sheets:** ETW daily sign-in sheets and payroll summary sheets reflect hours worked. ETW payroll summary sheets are generated at the end of the work shift on the 15<sup>th</sup> and last day of each month (or the first working day after those days).

**Injury/Illness:** In the event of **illness**, be sure to notify **both your work-site supervisor and your VRS Case manager immediately**. **Injuries, which occur at the assigned work-site**, must be reported **immediately** to your work-site supervisor, if practical, and immediately go to MEDVAMC Triage for treatment. Failure to do so may result in your discharge from the COMPENSATED WORK THERAPY program.

**Personal Belongings:** Valuables such as backpacks, purses, wallets, and important papers should not be kept in the work area. The MEDVAMC-CWT program will not be responsible for lost or stolen items. In keeping with accepted industry practices, radios, I-Pods, MP-3 players, and other electronic equipment are not permitted in work areas. Headsets are not allowed in MEDVAMC.

**Personal Hygiene:** You must maintain good personal hygiene. This includes regular bathing and clean clothes. Veterans are expected to dress in an appropriate manner that is appropriate to their respective work-sites. No revealing clothing, sexually suggestive,

pornographic, or illegal drug paraphernalia items are allowed on clothing worn. No shorts, sandals, or open-toed shoes are permitted.

**Name Badges:** *When working, your CWT Name Badge must always be worn visibly. Display badge with a picture showing to the public, above your waist, not on your sleeve, and below your neck.*

**Telephones:** Telephones are available for business use; however, please limit your usage to a reasonable timeframe.

**Alcohol/Drug Policy:** The MEDVAMC and the ETW are alcohol and drug-free. If your work site supervisor, ETW Program Manager, and/or staff believes that there is a clinical reason for a drug screen or breathalyzer to be requested, your treatment team will be notified to do so. Due to safety precautions, you will not be allowed to return to work until you have met with your clinical treatment team, including but not limited to: Addiction Therapist, Social Worker, Psychologist, and ETW Staff. During this time, a clinical decision will be made regarding your safety and return to your work site.

**Smoking:** No smoking is permitted on MEDVAMC grounds.

### **~ ABSENCES ~**

Planned, excused time off from work therapy is granted for attending medical appointments, job interviews, etc. when these procedures are followed. These appointments may be on-site at the MEDVAMC or off-site in the community. In keeping with the development of desirable work skills, Veterans in ETW are expected to learn to communicate regarding and balance their personal and health needs and appointments with their work therapy schedule. The ETW case manager and work site supervisor should be informed of any absence in advance if possible. This notice should be provided in advance for planned absences and within two (2) hours of our start time for unplanned absences. A call must be made for every day missed unless you make it clear that you will be out longer. If you do not call regarding your absence, or your call occurs more than two (2) hours after your start time, your absence will be considered a "no show." You will be expected to be at your assigned work-site and remain there for the time agreed upon between you and your supervisor. You are also responsible for notifying both your work-site supervisor or the VRS Case Manager if you leave the work-site early for any reason.

Please be aware that three (3) consecutive absences (no call/no show) may result in dismissal from the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. Also, even if the absences are excused, if there is a time off the pattern that significantly impacts your ability to benefit from the program, you will be asked to meet with the treatment team regarding your future participation. If you have a need for extended time off, contact your VRS Case Manager to discuss options. Decisions regarding extended time off will be made on an individual basis.

All the following group meetings are mandatory: ETW groups and individual sessions, Community Meetings, and (as requested) Vocational Treatment Team Meetings.

### ~ HEALTH SCREENING ~

Veterans should report any known medical problems to their assigned VRS Case Manager at the time of their intake evaluation. Veterans with medical issues that may impact their ability to perform work and lack a recent physical exam may be required to obtain a physical exam to determine the extent of their physical limitations.

Inoculations against such illnesses as hepatitis B, influenza, polio, tetanus, or other infectious diseases are provided by the medical center. TB testing is required for participation in ENRICHED TRANSITIONAL WORK. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Veterans will be required to have a medical clearance by their primary care physicians before participating.

### ~ EARNINGS ~

Veterans participating in ETW are not employees of the MEDVAMC. There is no sick leave, annual leave, travel pay, and/or holiday pay in ETW. Time away from the work-site for appointments is deducted from your timesheet.

January 1, 1999, a Federal law was passed which requires all recipients of federal payments be made through direct deposit (to a checking or savings account).

To establish a checking or savings account, you must have either an active, valid Texas ID or a Texas Driver's License. The ETW program is a therapeutic program. A therapeutic goal may entail repairing debt and beginning to establish a good credit history. Many businesses today will not hire you if you do not have a checking or savings account.

Your direct deposit account must be established in Austin before the money will be deposited into your account. It may take a week for Austin to activate your direct deposit once we have faxed over your paperwork. The ETW Program manager will provide you with the direct deposit form that your bank needs to fill out.

You may choose which bank or credit union to use for your direct deposit. If you have a history of debt problems, talk to us about joining the credit union or BBVA Bank. Once your direct deposit is established, and later you wish to change banks, you will need to contact the ETW Program Manager for instructions. **Direct pay must be deposited into your new account before you may close your old account.**

If you have an account with Smart Financial Credit Union or BBVA Bank and want to close the account, you must get a signed form from the ETW Program Manager. Smart Financial/BBVA Bank will close your account once all your payment has been received in your account.

**CHECK YOUR ACCOUNT TO SEE IF YOUR PAYROLL HAS BEEN DEPOSITED BEFORE YOU WITHDRAW ANY FUNDS. ETW IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR ANY REASON IF YOUR PAYROLL IS DEPOSITED LATE INTO YOUR ACCOUNT. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE TO ENSURE THERE ARE ADEQUATE FUNDS IN YOUR ACCOUNT TO PREVENT OVERDRAFT FEES!**

**If you cannot open a Savings or Checking account, you will not be able to work in the Work-For-Pay program.**

**THE FOLLOWING PROCEDURE IS PROOF OF YOUR ATTENDANCE.**

**Daily:** It is your responsibility to punch in on the time clock and sign in before starting work, then punch out and sign out at the end of your shift. Do not sign out when you sign in. If you do not follow punching and signing procedures, you may be locked out of the scanner and not be paid for that period.

**TIMESHEET HOURS** worked per day may not exceed (8) eight. Hours worked per pay period for ETW may not exceed (64) sixty-four. Before you may work over 64 hours, approval must be requested by the Worksite Supervisor, and it must be approved by the ETW Program Manager and the Worksite Supervisor in the service where you work.

Your supervisor will be responsible for maintaining and certifying your timesheet so your pay may be computed accurately. It is your responsibility to check the timesheet to make sure it is correct before signing it.

**No changes will be made once you and the supervisor sign your timesheet. Timesheets not signed by both the supervisor and Veteran will not be processed for payment. Your pay may be delayed for five business working days.**

Veterans in ETW are paid on or around the 11<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> of each month. If these dates occur on the weekend or a holiday, payroll will be paid on the next business day and is based on the current minimum wage standards.

Suppose you leave the Work-For-Pay program prematurely for any reason (i.e., regular or irregular discharge). In that case, your last payment will be processed on the next regularly scheduled payday, and you will not be paid early. You may not ask for special pay even if you leave the program prematurely. Your last payment will be sent to your direct deposit account.

**~ RELEASE OF YOUR MEDICAL RECORDS ~**

**How to See and Get Copies**

Under the Freedom of Information Act, you may access your official records. However, your request must be in writing, and you must reasonably describe what you want out of your medical records. Here is something to keep in mind: There may be a fee for this service. If your request is large, you might have to pay to get your copies.

- At home: You may write to MEDVAMC requesting copies of your record. It takes about 10 to 14 working days to process your request.
- In-person: Go to Medical Records, (Release of Information), Room 1B-304, sign a Form 10-5345, and describe on form information you want. Processing time is again 10 to 14 days.

There are four types of access that you may request:

- 1) Personally, to review your records and/or to get copies relating to yourself.
- 2) Copies to be sent to a third party, such as Texas Work Commission, or your insurance, etc.
- 3) An amendment to be made to some information in your record.
- 4) All releases are made of your record, including when and to whom it was released.

Check with your Case Manager if you need more information. You will find he/she can be a big help in getting what you need.

### **~ CONFLICT RESOLUTION ~**

A conflict is when you disagree with what someone has said or with what someone has done. Many times, conflict is due to poor communication between both parties. If you have a conflict with someone, the following are suggestions on how to handle your feelings and the situation:

- a. Try to remove yourself from the conflict by getting up and walking around. If asked what you are doing, just reply that you need time to calm down.
- b. Take deep breaths to help calm yourself.
- c. When you feel you can talk to the person you had the conflict with, tell them how you feel.
- d. If you do not feel you can talk to the person you had a conflict with that day, then find someone else to talk to about your feelings. Remember that most conflicts involve poor communication between both parties, so do not blame the other person. Look and see what you could have done differently.

### **~ GRADUATION/TERMINATION FROM WORK-FOR-PAY ~**

The length of participation in the ETW program is determined on an individual basis. Participants will either be discharged from the ETW Program when:

- a. Veteran decides to leave the program before the anticipated discharge date.

- b. Veteran is not making satisfactory progress despite efforts to adjust the plan and add supports
- c. Veteran is determined to have met maximum therapeutic benefit.
- d. Veteran demonstrates criminal or inappropriate behavior, i.e., theft, assault, sexual harassment or abuse, fighting, threatening behaviors, etc.
- e. Veteran has met the goals of his/her treatment plan.
- f. Veteran has obtained gainful competitive employment in the community.

### **Re-admission Policy**

If you leave the program without employment or without meeting your rehabilitation goal, will need a new consult to return. If you successfully completed the ETW program, however, you may return to VRS for community-based employment and can be reconsidered for ETW after one year. Program placement will be determined during assessment as clinically indicated.

If you have been discharged due to disruptive or criminal behavior, you may be considered for re-admission as clinically indicated on a case-by-case basis. Re-admission decisions are made on a case-by-case basis and are based on such factors as motivation to work, mental stability, compliance with treatment, and progress toward established goals. After one year of successfully completing the program, you can be considered for readmission.

### **Hospitalization**

If you are hospitalized for any reason, you may have to present a "return to duty" from your attending physician before returning to work therapy. If hospitalization exceeds 30 days, your file may be closed due to inactivity. It is imperative that you keep your VRC Case Manager and your work-site supervisor updated.

### **Disciplinary Action**

Violations of MEDVAMC hospital policies may result in disciplinary action. Theft, sexual abuse/harassment, or abusive language will not be tolerated. A professional attitude and appropriate conduct should always be maintained. If your attendance, behavior, or performance becomes unsatisfactory, creates an unsafe work environment, or is disruptive to the ETW Program's rehabilitation, you will be discharged from the program. Outbursts, threats, or acts of violence WILL NOT be tolerated. Problems should be discussed with your VRC Case Manager. Illegal activity will not be condoned in the ETW program. Incidents of illegal activity will be actively pursued and will result in dismissal from the program.

## **~ MONTHLY COMMUNITY MEETING ~**



All Veterans will be required to attend the monthly community meeting and will be given the opportunity to express concerns and receive information about the program. The outstanding workers will be announced. Two Veteran representatives will be voted upon.

### **~GUIDELINES FOR OUTSTANDING WORKER OF MONTH~**

1. Any staff member in Vocational Rehabilitation Section (VRS) or any work-site supervisor may nominate a veteran to the ETW Program Manager, and any ETW Veteran may nominate a ETW veteran by writing that veteran's name on an appropriate form located outside Room 2B-123 and placing it in the Suggestion Box.
2. Veteran nominated should have a minimum of one month in the ETW program before he/she may be nominated.
3. Veteran's attendance and participation in all phases of the ETW program will be considered (Case Management, Community Meetings, Job Search, etc.).

### **~ VETERANS' REPRESENTATIVE ~**

Veterans in the ETW program select the Veterans' Representative each month. He/she must have been in the program for at least one month. You may nominate anyone you feel that would represent you well. After all, nominations have been made, nominees are voted on, and veteran receiving the most votes is the Veterans' Representative until the next community meeting.

### **TERM LIMITATIONS: A Veteran may only serve three (3) times.**

The Veterans' Representative is the spokesperson for the ETW Veterans. In general, he/she will be available to hear statements of concern and, if appropriate, offer ideas for resolving a concern or recommend action (procedure) to take to get information to resolve the concern.

The Veterans' Representative will approach the ETW Program Manager or any other ETW Staff person as necessary for discussion on matters related to programming and Veteran issues.

Serving as Veterans' Representative is an honor and responsibility. It is recommended that this honor be included in résumés and applications of the veteran in the future.

### **~ MY SUGGESTION~**

We want to hear how we may continue to improve our services. Tell us how we are doing by completing a Suggestion Form on any plain paper of your choice and placing it the **Suggestion Box** outside the ETW Program Manager's Office.

The Suggestion Box is always kept locked, and suggestions are removed regularly and read by VRS Staff. Additionally, appropriate suggestions are read at the Monthly Community Meeting.

**~ TRANSPORTATION ASSISTANCE ~**

- Transportation assistance is available for those Veterans participating in Vocational Rehabilitation Services for job-seeking activities.
- You may be eligible to receive transportation assistance while working the CWT/ETW program. We want to help you address your need and ease the strain of financial hardship related to transportation.
- Once you are assigned to a work-site schedule, you may receive transportation assistance to cover up to two pay periods or until you receive your first direct deposit for \$50.00 or more. Once that \$50.00 or more is made, transportation assistance will stop.
- You will NOT be billed for this transportation assistance.
- Transportation assistance will NOT be available for veterans who are NOT participating in ETW.

**HOSPITAL LISTINGS**

Chaplain Service .....	713-794-7125
Consumer Affairs .....	713-794-7883
Information Desk .....	713-794-7191
Michael E. DeBakey Veterans Affairs Medical Center (MEDVAMC) .....	713-791-1414
VA Police & Security Service .....	713-794-7106
VA Regional Office .....	713-383-1980

**OTHER LISTINGS**

AIDS Foundation .....	713-623-6796
Career & Recovery Resources, Inc. ....	713-754-7000
Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County, Inc. ....	713-739-7514
Food Stamps (have your zip code) .....	713-767-2000
Harris County Health Department (Clinics) .....	713-439-6100

Open Door Mission .....	713-921-7520
Salvation Army (for men) .....	713-224-2875
Salvation Army (for women and families) .....	713-650-6530
Santa Maria (for women).....	713-957-2413
Social Security .....	1-800-772-1213
Star of Hope (for men).....	713-227-8900
Star of Hope (for women and families).....	713-222-2220

**~ INFORMED CONSENT ~**

Please sign below to indicate that you have been provided a copy of the Vocational Rehabilitation Service Handbook. Your signature indicates that you have read, understand, and agree to abide by these expectations and policies. A copy of this consent form will be sent for scanning into your Computerized Patient Records System.

The CWT program that I am assigned to is:

Community-Based Employment Services

Enriched Transitional Work

Supported Employment

Currently, I,  choose to participate  choose not to participate

Print Veteran's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Veteran's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

VRS Case manager Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_