Angela Yeager: Hi, and welcome to the Oregon Employment First Podcast. I am Angela Yeager with Employment First. This week we are talking about how and when to refer to vocational rehabilitation. Joining me today is Derek Hill, vocational rehabilitation counselor in the Portland metro area, and Allison Enriquez, policy analyst with the Office of Developmental Disability services. Welcome both of you.

Derek Hill: Thank you.

Allison Enriquez: Thank you.

Angela Yeager: Thanks. So, um, Derek and Allison are here sort of on a little bit of different topics, but related. So, Derek, we're gonna talk to you first today about how and when to refer to vocational rehabilitation. We get a lot of questions about this in developmental disability services, and, and we really want to get that vocational rehabilitation perspective on this, on this questions. So, first of all, let's start at a baseline. How does vocational rehabilitation get a referral?

Derek Hill: Typically vocational rehabilitation gets referrals through public orientation, uh, but we do, do have a real with Developmental Disability Services, so, uh, case manager, service coordinators, or personal agents from, uh, Developmental Disability Services can directly refer, uh, people that, that they're working with that are assigned to them on their caseloads. So, uh, that's a nice step where somebody with a developmental disability can kind of skip the public orientation and they go directly to having an intake meeting with a vocational rehabilitation counselor like myself, and, so, we kind of give a one-on-one explanation of the program to see if the services are a good fit for them.

Angela Yeager: Great. So, one of the reasons, and besides your awesome personality of course that we asked you to be here today is you
have an interesting perspective. You've been a case manager in the developmental disability world, and now, of course, you're with vocational rehabilitation. So, when you were a personal agent, uh, in developmental disabilities, when and how did you refer people to vocational rehabilitation at that time?

**Derek Hill:** Uh, I, I think really, it's changed a little bit. I, I've been with VR for, uh, over 4 years now. Um, prior to that I, I referred people to vocational rehabilitation as a personal agent. Um, you know, really, when people had an interest to work, I don't, I don't think that that's changed greatly. I think with Employment First, the, um, service model and what's available to individual is, is changed. There's a few more options on the table. Um, so, you know, as, as a personal agent, as a PA, usually it was, uh, if I had met with a, a client or, um, an individual at their ISP meeting, at their, uh, service plan meeting, and they had said that, uh, you know, that they wanted to work, but they needed some support in doing it, uh, we'd kind of explore vocational rehabilitation to see if there might be some, some support there for them. So, you know, real, really based off of, of, uh, people's interests. I think probably what's changed in that time is that it's a more structured with a career development plan. Those discussions are a little more structured then when I used to have 'em.

**Angela Yeager:** Mm hmm.

**Derek Hill:** But, um, but I don't think that the na, that, that it's changed greatly.

**Angela Yeager:** Okay. So, now that you're a counselor with vocational rehabilitation, how and when do you typically get referrals? And more importantly, I think, for our listeners, how would you, what would you prefer? So, I guess, what, so how do you typically get referrals and what, how would you really prefer to get referrals.

**Derek Hill:** Mm hmm. So, uh, vocational rehabilitation offices can be a, a little different throughout the state on how they, uh, handle referrals. So, I'm –

**Angela Yeager:** Mm hmm.
Derek Hill: – more speaking for the Clackamas County branch. It's, I think, getting more standardized with time. But, um, you know, we actually have a form out there that, uh, the case managers need to fill out, uh, the, the Developmental Disability Services, it's, a one-page form with demographic information about the individual that they're directly referring, uh, and then they send it in to our office, and our office just looks at capa, counselor capacity, who, how we can get that person in the fastest in terms of our intakes, and, so, they're kind of scheduled across the office that way. So, um, I don't really have a lot of, um, control in how I get the referrals. We have a few partnership, a few partnership programs that, that do refer in, um, but again, they kind of go into that generalized, uh, distribution of work. So, um, you know, I mean, I think really just looking as a VR counselor that's gonna meet with somebody for a direct referral to vocational rehabilitation, I think the most important thing is, uh, you know, that that person has a, a good support team in place, uh, you know, that they have, uh, support if they need it. Not everybody does, but to get to meetings, to follow through on VR services, uh, if they have, um, you know, support protocols in place, that those protocols are current and available; um, that a behavior support plan, if one of those is in existence, that that's available, and that that information comes with the individual to the intake. Um, that really helps, uh, from our perspective, um, in terms of, of, uh, you know, being able to, uh, get things moving quickly on our end. So, so, yeah, just really, that the support, support team behind the person is organized. That's really essential.

Angela Yeager: So, what does a good referral look like? You kind of addressed this in your previous answer, but let's talk about that in a little bit more detail.

Derek Hill: Mm hmm.

Angela Yeager: You know, when you, what would be sort of, like, the dream referral –

Derek Hill: Mm hmm.

Angela Yeager: – for you as it’s coming in the door.

Derek Hill: Yeah, um, I, well, I think, so, all those things I talked about, you know, if the person does have support documents that those are available.
Um, if they do have any doc, medical documentation that we can use to, uh, to, uh, establish their eligibility, that's really helpful. I think a lot of case managers, um, in Developmental Disability Services don't realize that, you know, VR is going, vocational rehabilitation is gonna do its own eligibility, and we prefer and need to have kind of first source medical documentations of the person that has psychological evaluations or medical records that they have, um, from their doctors. We'll have to request those. If they have some available that they can bring to the intake meeting, uh, that will also help VR, uh, speed up the eligibility –

Angela Yeager: Mm hmm.

Derek Hill: – so, so, I guess in terms of, there's the, the developmental disability documentation along with medical documentation and kind of having all that stuff ready. Uh, the individual being, um, you know, vocational rehabilitation talks about motivated, ready, and reliable. Those are the three qualities that we're looking for in what we call participants, uh, in order to kind of move them forward and get them into employment. So, just having that individual that is, is really motivated, uh, to show up. You know? That's 90 percent of the reason I see people not be successful in vocational rehabilitation is that they don't make scheduled appointments, or they don't return phone calls. Uh, so, really, um, you know, that they're motivated, that they're reliable. Um, those are, those are kind of the, uh, the main qualities in, uh, in addition to the documentation.

Angela Yeager: And, of course, I would assume also documentation of work, uh, history? Would that also happen at the referral, or is that at a different point?

Derek Hill: Uh, we gather some of that in our service questionnaire. It has, uh, people fill out their work history. Um, some people come in with resumes, and that's great, you know? We can look at and review their resume at intake and see what they've done and where they're hoping to go. Um, some people don't have that, and, and then we work on, you know, developing it with them. So, it just, yeah, we definitely employment history, having a sense of, uh, dates as, as specifically as they can be of where they've worked and that kind of thing is, is really helpful.

Angela Yeager: Yeah, and so, finally, for the last question reg, uh, reg, regarding vocational rehabilitation specific referrals, so, if someone is in the
process of discovery, and this is a question we get a lot, uh, throughout the
state, um, people are applying this unevenly. So, when should a person
come to vocational rehabilitation? You know? Do we hear, we hear at the
beginning of discovery –

Derek Hill: Yeah.

Angela Yeager: – before they've even served discovery, at the end of
discovery. So, what, is our preference –

Derek Hill: Yeah.

Angela Yeager: – as a, as a vocational rehabilitation counselor?

Derek Hill: Well, yeah, and I think that's a good point, Angela, that you
make, and it's my preference. Um, I know personally, um, you know,
having, you know, been the specific developmental disability counselor in
VR for a while and, and from my past, I'm sure my view varies from other
people's a little bit, but I think really just having, for me, um, if, if the service
coordinator personal agent, that case manager knows that a discovery is
likely, and that the person wants to do discovery, um, that they found a
provider, uh, that will start that process with them. Um, that, I think that's
huge for me. That makes life, um, a lot more easier in terms of the flow of
VR services if, if the person's already connected to an agency that's willing
to do discovery. Um, so, I don't, uh, you know, I think that that would be a
good time to refer to VR, as soon as the discovery's started, because we
have paperwork on the VR end, you know, because if a discovery runs 2 to
3 months, we have paperwork on the VR end that we can be doing so that
the minute that discovery's over, we can move forward with, um, a VR, a
vocational rehabilitation plan for employment, which is kind of, like, gonna
be the start of a job search and that based off of what the discovery said.
The one caveat that I would say to that is, at, um, that I really caution, uh,
developmental disability case managers when they're making a referral to
discovery, um, the biggest pitfall I've seen there is, is you, they really need
to be careful about finding an agency that's willing to do the long-term
support, that understands that person's, um, that person's sup, ongoing
support needs. If it's gonna be, like, 50 percent job coach, um, ongoing or
something like that, that they found an agency that commits to that, and
that that's the agency that they, uh, choose to, that the individual chooses
for discovery so that, you know, we have a continuity of service and, and
we don't have an agency that just works with somebody for discovery, but then doesn't want to follow through on the vocational rehabilitation job development, and, because they don't have, oftentimes, the capacity to job coach that person.

Angela Yeager: And I understand, and Allison, weigh in here, that it is best practice, really, for the discovery provider to also provide job coaching, because they've already gotten to know that person through discovery, so it makes sense then for that to go into job developmental –

Allison Enriquez: Mm hmm.

Angela Yeager: – for that person. Is that correct?

Allison Enriquez: Yeah, I mean, the, uh, intent of the service of discovery is really to launch some into job development, and then job coaching, and so, yeah, absolutely.

Angela Yeager: That was great. So, I think, um, this sh, this segues nicely into our next topic, which is the uniform referral and release, which Derek said he's not too familiar with, so he's gonna also help me to grill Allison about this subject a little bit, but it's very much related to this topic of referral, because we're hearing across the state that there is, um, con, you know, maybe some confusion in the field, or uneven practices in the field. Um, both on the developmental disability side and the vocational rehabilitation side, and then of course we have our partners with education. So, Allison, you've been working on uniform referral and release, uh, for a while now.

Allison Enriquez: Mm hmm.

Angela Yeager: It's been –

Allison Enriquez: Mm hmm.

Angela Yeager: – a huge part of your life, uh, you've mentioned for the last year, so tell, tell us what it is exactly.

Allison Enriquez: Yeah, I'm excited to see it, uh, um, sort of launch and take flight during, um, but, yeah, we've been working with, uh,
employment first, stakeholders from vocational rehabilitation services, developmental disabilities, and education, in order to, um, develop, uh, the uniform referral and release of information tools, um, that can be piloted and actually we've seen a lot of, um, interest from other partner agencies, um, thinking that, you know, this might also be a good tool if someone needs a referral, has been working, that work and needs a referral to vocational rehabilitation, and, uh, maybe DV too, um, for employment services. Um, but it was after sort of the, recommendation from stakeholders that worked to, um, develop, uh, referral and release of information as part of the, um, efforts to seamlessly transition, um, individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities from education, um, into work. Um, and how to seamlessly do that and some of the local employment first teams, um, had developed a, um, uh, referral and release and, um, some of those tools had been working really well and how do we take that information and share it with, um, other regions, but some of the feedback too has definitely been, um, there's value in making sure the uniform piece to it, that, um, almost some people saying, we don't care what it is. We just want to know that we're all in agreement and it's been vetted and developed and reviewed and piloted and tested and some of those other things too. So, um, that's why, you know, we've worked to develop this with stakeholders and pilot to for a while, and then, um, hopefully can take it statewide soon.

Angela Yeager: And you've been, you're still in the pilot process right now? Is that correct?

Allison Enriquez: Yeah, um, and so, we tested an initial version, um, earlier in the year, and we are, um, made a lot of changes and updates and, um, based on feedback from the pilot teams and stakeholders more broadly, and so, right now we have a second version, um, that we hope that is con, we're continuing to test, um, with pilot teams that are in Marion County, Multnomah, and – I'm sorry. Not Multnomah. Marion County, um, Jackson County, and Umatilla. Uh –

Angela Yeager: Umatilla.

Allison Enriquez: Yeah.

Angela Yeager: Okay. Great.
Allison Enriquez: They've been providing a lot of great feedback. Um, and, yeah, so, we hope to be able to have it available to take statewide in the earlier part of next year.

Angela Yeager: So, how will the referral and release, uh, help vocational rehabilitation and Developmental Disability services?

Allison Enriquez: One thing that I think is nice about it, um, is that it allows, um, for a referral to be made to either vocational rehabilitation or ODDF, um, or both, uh, multiple agencies simultaneously, um, and should reduce, um, the amount of paperwork that a person needs to complete for the various agencies, um, and then reduce the amount of time that people need to spend following up, um, in order to get a signed release from, um, the person. So, what's nice is the referral tool itself, um, it can, uh, the person that's the person to make a referral that can identify all of the information that exists, like, you're saying protocols, um, or a behavior support plan. Um, if it already exists, um, it might, also might just swerve as a, um, sort of menu of things that might be developed during the course of employment services. Um, and so, that, used in combination with the release of information, allows you to identify all the members of the person's support team, um, and then the person can very, from the very beginning, up front, when they say I want employment services, they can decide, I want to, I, I want employment services. I want support to get a job, and I agree for all of my team, um, to share information about me in order to help me get a job, and they can decide that up front, um, and there then isn't the need to necessarily, um, uh, uh, do multiple other releases –

Angela Yeager: Mm hmm.

Allison Enriquez: – that kind of slow down the process down the road. Um, and also, hopefully, it will, uh, decreases the redundancy that sometimes, if information already exists and then the referral to a new agency is made, and then the person find themselves in a type of working experience when, um, that information might already exist elsewhere and making sure that that information kind of gets translated from agency to agency.

Angela Yeager: So, it sounds like for the person on the receiving end, the person receiving services –
Derek Hill: Mm hmm.

Angela Yeager: – uh, the consumer that this would maybe expedite the process or speed things up a little bit. Are there other benefits to the, the person receiving services?

Allison Enriquez: Yeah, I think, you know, what we're hoping is a, uh, you know, services won't be delayed, um, due to unnecessarily duplication of having to recreate the information, um, and then, yeah, the redundant or duplicative efforts. Um, we do hope that it'll streamline or expedite services for, for both the person and, um, their, uh, those that are coordinating employment services, because there is, it's, um, hopefully more streamlined, but there's not, uh, having to spend extra time following up to get information; that that information is clearly identified in the referral tool, and that that information comes with the person when, uh, they go to VR for their first intake appointment.

Angela Yeager: That's great.

Derek Hill: Mm hmm.

Angela Yeager: So, it's all about streamlining the process, making things easier on, uh, for the consumer, as well as for the people working in the field. Um, so, again, uh, tell us, Allison –

Derek Hill: Mm hmm.

Angela Yeager: – when is this expected to roll out? I know it's being piloted at the moment. Do you have a, you don't have to have an exact date but just, uh –

Allison Enriquez: Yes.

Angela Yeager: – thereabouts.

Allison Enriquez: Yeah. Yeah. Um, so, hopefully, we're hoping for early 2019. Um, we're definitely excited about the work that Marion, Jackson, and Umatilla are doing in order to –

Angela Yeager: Okay.
Allison Enriquez: – to test these tools.

Angela Yeager: So, it might already be out by the time people hear this?

Allison Enriquez: Yeah.

Angela Yeager: So, that’s great. Okay. Well, Allison and Derek, thank you so much for joining us on the Employment First Podcast, and thank you for listening.