

In-Voc Pilot Program

The Lifetime Care and Support Authority is committed to helping to increase return to work rates following Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) through the funding a pilot program, In-Voc, to enable early access to vocational rehabilitation services in NSW SCI units.

Extensive stakeholder consultation was undertaken as part of the planning of this project. A working party was established that included representatives from the SCI units, The State Spinal Cord Injury Service, Workcover NSW, ParaQuad and Spinal Cord Injuries Australia. Representatives from the SCI units were heavily involved in the planning of the pilot program.

The Authority released an open public request for tender (RFT) VR 2011 Early Access to Vocational Rehabilitation Services Pilot on Monday 24 January 2011. The purpose of the tender was to select a provider to work in partnership with the NSW SCI units and the Authority to implement and deliver the pilot program. Applications closed at 5pm, Tuesday 8 March 2011. 7 applications were received.

An Evaluation Committee was formed who were responsible for the evaluation of the applications and recommendations about the outcomes of the tender process in accordance with the Tender Evaluation Plan. The committee included representatives from each of the NSW SCI units, experts in vocational rehabilitation as well as a representative of the Authority.

The Evaluation Committee evaluated all of the tender applications and recommended CRS Australia as the successful applicant. CRS Australia was assessed as submitting the application of the highest quality and as providing the best value for money to the Authority. The Executive Director of the Authority approved the recommendation of Evaluation Committee.

In-Voc commenced on June 1 2011 and will run for a two year period. Any person admitted to Royal North Shore Hospital Spinal Unit, Moorong Spinal Unit or Prince of Wales Hospital Spinal Unit within the pilot program period is eligible to participate regardless of age, injury mechanism, eligibility for the Lifetime Care and Support Scheme, compensation status or co morbidities.

The model of vocational rehabilitation is an individual case coordinated approach based on elements of the New Zealand Kaleidoscope model. Access to vocational rehabilitation services will commence during inpatient rehabilitation and will be integrated into the overall inpatient rehabilitation program.

Three Vocational Consultants (VC) employed by CRS Australia are based in each of the SCI units and work collaboratively with members of the unit clinical team. A VC will work in partnership with a Client to undertake comprehensive vocational rehabilitation assessments and identify barriers, solutions and initiatives to facilitate a return to work. The Client will be supported by a VC to develop and implement their individual return to work plan.

Specific vocational rehabilitation services may include:

- A series of vocational conversations that promote and facilitate a timely and safe return to work or study
- Vocational Counselling
- Liaison, education and negotiation with current or potential employers
- Job seeking skills training
- Workplace assessments
- Task analysis

- Facilitating access to work experience and work trial opportunities
- Assisting the Client to explore retraining opportunities
- Establishing relationships and refining processes with key stakeholders that will support and facilitate return to work e.g. Centrelink, TAFE NSW, Spinal Outreach Service, SCI unit clinical team
- Provision of information to Clients and SCI unit clinical team about Commonwealth and state funded services and programs that support return to work or study
- Working with members of the SCI clinical team, attend case conferences and other unit meetings as appropriate as well as contributing to medical / clinical records
- Communication, reporting and documentation required by the Authority and as part of the evaluation.

As of 30th July 2011, 28 people had elected to participate in the In-Voc pilot program, and of these 24 were employed at time of injury. Initial feedback from the In-Voc Team, SCI unit staff and inpatients is positive. The In-Voc team have been integrated into the existing inpatient teams. Anecdotal reports to the Authority have included comments that the spinal unit teams had not realised what a gap they had until the In-Voc pilot started, and how significant the role of work plays in people lives with the In-Voc intervention helping to complete the rehab circle.

The Authority will continue to work closely with the In-Voc team, SCI unit staff and other stakeholders as the service is implemented. Any issues that arise will be addressed. The issue of access to computer equipment has been identified and the Authority is providing the In-Voc team with additional computer equipment such as laptops and computer input devices to be used with in-patients to facilitate vocational rehabilitation activities.

Formal evaluation of In-Voc will be undertaken by the University of Sydney Rehabilitation Studies Unit. The evaluation aims to evaluate the following hypothesis:

- Early access to vocational rehabilitation services for in-patients in NSW spinal units will increase return to work rates.
- Early access to rehabilitation services will have a positive impact on general health and well being.

The secondary aims of the evaluation will be:

- to establish the extent to which the components of the intervention are provided
- to gain an understanding of the intervention from the perspective of the participants
- to assess the cost-effectiveness of the intervention from a societal perspective.

A formal evaluation is considered important for In-Voc for a number of reasons. Firstly, it will enable the effectiveness of the pilot intervention to be determined, this type of intervention has not been previously been formally evaluated. The results will be used to assist the Authority make decisions about the funding of the service beyond the pilot period. The information obtained in the evaluation about individual's perception of the service will assist with the identification of issues for resolution and improvement of the service.

Any questions about In-Voc should be directed to Jacqueline Scott on 9394 1330 or via jascott@lifetimecare.nsw.gov.au