



**Resource Coordinator:
Assisting Employees with Disabilities and Other Barriers Overcome Poverty and
Succeed in Work**

VocRehab Vermont, in partnership with United Way, has been actively involved in a statewide initiative to improve employee attendance, retention, and advancement, based on the Bridges out of Poverty principles promoted by Dr. Ruby Payne. As part of that initiative, the VR's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant has funded United Way to hire caseworkers - a Resource Coordinator - who works on-site at several businesses to assist their low-income employees, including people with disabilities. ***(Note: The GCEPD is tasked with advising VocRehab on the implementation of the MIG grant.)*** The Resource Coordinator provides intensive support to vulnerable employees who are at risk for leaving their jobs or for who attendance has been a problem. In 2008 the Resource Coordinator was shared between Rhino Foods, Engleberth Construction, and Fletcher Allen Healthcare; since then Green Mountain Coffee Roasters has been added to the pilot.

These employers have initiated a number of activities to support their low wage workers and have already seen a positive effect on their retention rates. There have been a number of very positive stories of individuals who have been helped by the Resource Coordinator to solve problems that could have threatened their employment and several instances of referrals to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for disability services. The employers recognize that in order to sustain the model they will take over the funding of this position over the next two years.

A group of project stakeholders, such as VR Benefits Counselors and Employee Assistance Counselors, and eligibility staff in Economic Services provide information and support for the Resource Coordinator on disability and other issues. VR's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant program will evaluate the impact on retention rates and other outcomes to determine how cost-effective the "embedded" caseworker is in helping employees overcome poverty-related barriers that affect their employment. The evaluation also helps project partners and employers identify additional related strategies to improve employee attendance, retention and advancement. Promoting strategies that result in individuals staying in jobs long enough to increase wages to self-sufficiency levels improves the lives of those individuals, the profitability and success of their employers, and the economic development outlook for the State of Vermont.