**ALABAMA DEPARTMENT**

**OF REHABILITATION SERVICES**

**VISION REHABILITATION THERAPY PROGRAM**

**POLICY MANUAL**

**May 21, 2018**

**MISSION**

**"To enable Alabama's children and adults with disabilities to achieve their maximum potential."**

**Created by the Alabama Legislature in 1994, the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) is the state agency that serves people with disabilities from birth to old age through a “continuum of services.” Services are provided through 25 community offices, reaching residents in all 67 counties.**

**ADRS is comprised of four major programs:**

**Alabama’s Early Intervention System, serving children from birth to age 3, coordinates services statewide for infants and toddlers with developmental delays.**

**Children’s Rehabilitation Service, serving children and teens from birth to 21 with special health-care needs and their families.**

**Vocational Rehabilitation Service, provides specialized employment- and education-related services and training to assist teens and adults with disabilities in becoming employed. The VRS-Blind/Deaf program provides assistance to Alabamians statewide through its Blind Services, Deaf Services and OASIS (Older Alabamians System of Information and Services) programs.**

**State of Alabama Independent Living/Homebound Service, provides a wide range of education and home-based services to assist people with the most-severe disabilities in leading independent lives at home, at school or in the workplace.**

**1. PURPOSES AND BASIC ASSURANCES FOR ALABAMA VISION REHABILITATION THERAPY PROGRAM**

**The Alabama Vision Rehabilitation Therapy Program is a component of the Vocational Rehabilitation Service. The purpose of the vision rehabilitation profession is to instruct blind and visually impaired persons in the use of those compensatory skills and adaptive devices that will enable them to achieve their maximum potential. A rehabilitation therapist evaluates, instructs, and guides a person with a visual impairment through an individualized plan of instruction designed to help that person perform daily life activities.**

**The legal basis for rehabilitation therapy services is the Code of Alabama, Section 21-1-17** **Chapter 9 Sections 21-9-1,3,9, and 11.** **This is implemented by the agreement between the Department of Rehabilitation Services and the Alabama Institute for Deaf and Blind. Funding for rehabilitation therapy services is contained in the budget agreement; with the Alabama Institute for the Deaf and Blind participating to the extent contained in the agreement. Supervision of rehabilitation therapy is vested in the Department of Rehabilitation Services.**

* 1. **There is no residency duration or other requirement, which would exclude from services an otherwise eligible individual who is presently living in the state. The Vision Rehabilitation Therapy Program will process and evaluate referred individuals in an equitable and expeditious manner.**
  2. **Eligibility for rehabilitation services is determined without regard to sex, race, creed, age, color, national origin, or type of disability.**
  3. **When appropriate, the Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (VRT) shall provide the referral necessary to assist persons with disabilities in securing needed services from other agencies and organizations.**
  4. **The VRT must document in the case record a rationale for any decision to provide, alter, or deny services.**
  5. **It is the policy of Adult Vocational Rehabilitation Services that all programs, projects, and activities shall be carried out in a manner consistent with the principles of respect for individual dignity, personal responsibility, self-determination, and pursuit of meaningful careers, based on informed choice.**
  6. **The State Agency shall have on its staff, or arrange to have available, individuals able to communicate with applicants and consumers who rely on special modes of communication such as manual communication, tactile, oral, and non-verbal communication devices.**
  7. **The rehabilitation staff shall be responsible for providing all data necessary to comply with the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, Division of Adult Vocational Rehabilitation Services and federal agency reporting requirements.**
  8. **Each employee of Adult Vocational Rehabilitation Services will comply with the policies and procedures of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services.**
  9. **Due Process, Confidentiality, and Basic Assurance policies are the same for the VRT Program as the policies for the general agency. These policies can be found in the Administrative Code.**
  10. **Classification of consumers receiving VRT services**

**(a) General Services- any individual with a visual impairment not receiving services through a counselor in the Adult Vocational Rehabilitation Program (AVRS), but who need rehabilitation services to improve the quality of life.**

**(b) Vocational Rehabilitation Consumers- are those persons receiving services from a VR counselor and are referred to the rehabilitation therapist by the VR counselor.**

**(c) OASIS Consumers- persons who are age 55 and older with a visual impairment who are not employed and do not have employment as a goal but need independent living skills training.**

**1.11 Referral Process**

**Referrals can be from any source and made directly to the VRT. The VRT is responsible for ensuring that referrals are contacted within three business days of receipt and documented as a referral in the case management system. The VRT is responsible for informing new referrals on the availability of Vocational Rehabilitation and/or Orientation and Mobility services.**

**1.12 Summary of VRT program.**

**Eligibility for vision rehabilitation therapy services will be determined by the Vision Rehabilitation Therapist (VRT). After services have been requested, the VRT will perform a functional assessment to determine if the consumer will benefit from the vision rehabilitation therapy services. The VRT, in consultation with the blind/visually-impaired consumer and other appropriate rehabilitation team members, will develop an Individualized Written Teaching Program (IWTP).**

**Vision Rehabilitation Therapy services are not based on income and are at no cost to the consumer. Expenditures of funds will be consistent with agency guidelines. The VRT, with consumer participation, will provide documentation and rationale for case closure. The VRT will maintain an active public relations program for the purpose of informing the blind/visually-impaired population, departmental staff, and the general public of rehabilitation services. All ADRS’s VRT’s will comply with the ethical standards and guidelines established by the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals for Vision Rehabilitation Therapists.**

**2. RECORD OF SERVICES**

**2.1 The Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services will establish and maintain a case record for each applicant and/or recipient of rehabilitation therapy services. To the degree applicable, each consumer record will contain the following.**

**(a) Written referral from Orientation and Mobility Specialist (OMS), VR Counselor, and/or other individuals for services.**

**(b) Documentation sufficient to determine eligibility or the need for services.**

**(c) Documentation for ineligibility specifying the reason.**

**(d) Documentation of IWTP and advisement of the confidentiality of all information pertaining to his/her case.**

**(e) Documentation of written consent to release or obtain information concerning consumer.**

**(f) Documentation of each instructional session in a progress report.**

**(g) Documentation of provision of adaptive equipment.**

**(h) Documentation in the form of a final report stating the reason for closing, including completion of stated goals and objectives.**

**(i) Documentation concerning any action and decision involving the individual's request for an administrative review of Agency action or fair hearing.**

**(j) Documentation of evidence and reasoning for a determination that the consumer is no longer able to participate or benefit from their VRT program must be in the case file prior to closure of the case.**

**3. ELIGIBILITY**

**The Vision Rehabilitation Therapy program will provide services to blind and visually impaired without regard to age or economic need. Priority will be given to persons with severe visual disabilities who are Vocational Rehabilitation consumers. Eligibility determinations must be made within 60 days of application of services. If eligibility cannot be determined within 60 days, the case file must have documentation justifying delay.**

**3.1 An individual is eligible for VRT services if the individual:**

**(a) Has a visual impairment which constitutes or results in substantial impediment to their ability to perform independent living skills in their environment.**

**(b) Has the potential to benefit from VRT services and requires those services in order to function at their maximum level for independence.**

**3.2 Assessment to Determine Eligibility**

**(a) In order to determine if an applicant is eligible for VRT services, an assessment of functional capacity/limitations will be performed and, when possible, appropriate medical documentation will be secured. If medical documentation is not available, justification must be documented in the case file.**

**(b) For each individual determined eligible for VRT services, the case record must include documentation of eligibility.**

**3.3 Ineligibility Certification**

**(a) An applicant may be determined ineligible whenever the VRT determines, on the basis of clear and convincing evidence, that an applicant for or recipient of vision rehabilitation therapy services does not have a disability which constitutes a substantial impediment to independent living.**

**(b) An applicant may be determined ineligible whenever the VRT determines, on the basis of clear and convincing evidence, that an applicant does not have the mental or physical capacity to benefit from VRT services.**

**(c) When an applicant for VRT services is unavailable during an extended period of time to complete an assessment for determining eligibility and the VRT specialist has made repeated efforts to contact them in order to encourage participation, the case may be closed without any determination with regard to eligibility. Documentation of these efforts should be in the case file.**

**4. INDIVIDUALIZED WRITTEN TEACHING PLAN (IWTP)**

**4.1 General Provisions**

**4.1.1 There will be written goals and objectives initiated with each eligible individual for vision rehabilitation therapy services.**

**4.1.2 A copy of the written goals and objectives will be provided to the consumer, VR counselor, and/or Orientation and Mobility Specialist.**

**4.1.3 If this plan cannot be initiated within 60 days of eligibility, justification should be documented in the case file.**

**4.2 Development of the IWTP**

**4.2.1 The rehabilitation therapy goals and objectives will be determined after the initial-functional assessment by the VRT.**

**The plan goals and objectives will be periodically reviewed.**

**4.2.2 Content of the IWTP**

**(a) The IWTP will be developed in conjunction with the consumer and/or VR counselor and Vision Rehabilitation Therapist.**

**(b) The IWTP will include goals and objectives of the consumer.**

**(c) The IWTP will include the specific rehabilitation therapy services to be provided.**

**(d) The IWTP will be periodically reviewed and revised when needed.**

**4.2.3 Consumer Choice**

**Individuals in need of VRT services must be active participants in the development of their VRT program including making meaningful and informed choices about the selection of goals, objectives and services.**

**5. FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY**

**5.1 Prudent utilization of financial resources shall be maintained at all times.**

**5.2 Only those funds necessary for appropriate training tools and supplies will be expended.**

**5.3 For vocational rehabilitation counselor sponsored consumers the counselor’s funds should be utilized to purchase training tools and supplies.** **General funds can be utilized for VR consumers to purchase training tools and supplies if appropriate.**

**5.4 For general consumers the general service budget should be utilized to purchase teaching tools and supplies.**

**5.5 For OASIS consumers, the budget should be utilized until depleted and then the general service budget may be used.**

**5.6 When tools and supplies are issued to a consumer, there must be a receipt listing items signed and dated by the consumer in the case file. This date must match the documentation of instruction where the items were issued.**

**5.7 The provision of tools and supplies shall conform to the written instructions for requisitioning and accounting for such purchases.**

**5.8 When an individual is eligible for comparable benefits under any other program or agency, those benefits must be utilized insofar as they are adequate and do not interfere with achieving the rehabilitation objectives of the individual.**

**6. SERVICES**

**Rehabilitation therapy services will be provided as appropriate to the rehabilitation needs of each individual as determined by the functional assessment process and in accordance with IWTP.**

**These services may include, but not limited to:**

**6.1 Assessment of individual and referral to other agency(s) if needed.**

**6.2 Instruction in independent living skills such as:**

**(a) Use of low vision devices and skills**

**(b) Communication skills**

**(c) Access technology**

**(d) Personal management**

**(e) Money management**

**(f) Meal preparation**

**(g) General home management**

**(h) Residential orientation and mobility**

**(i) Dependent care, including pets**

**(j) Leisure time activities.**

**6.3 Instruction in skills related to employment such as job readiness, business practices, record keeping.**

**6.4 Adjusting to Blindness counseling with the individual, family members, and/or friends relating to the sensory loss and medical aspects of the condition.**

**6.5 Provision of and instruction in use of adaptive equipment.**

**7. CASE CLOSURE AND OUTCOMES**

**Cases are closed as Rehabilitated or Other Than Rehabilitated. Regardless of the outcome of the case a closure letter should be provided to the consumer detailing instruction and goals achieved or the reason for closure. A copy of this letter must be in the case file.**

**7.1 Rehabilitated- training completed successfully**

**(a) Determined to be eligible**

**(b) Provided a post-functional assessment documenting progress in meeting IWTP goals**

**(c) Completed all goals in accordance with the IWTP**

**(d) Documentation of progress in case file as a result of training.**

**7.2 Other Than Rehabilitated**

**After consultation and assessment has been completed with the consumer and no vision rehabilitation services are indicated, the case will be closed based on one or more of the following reasons:**

**(a) Assessment, no training needed.**

**(b) Training not completed.**

**(c) Unable to locate.**

**A case can be declared unable to locate if:**

**1. Two phone calls result in no response and**

**2. Two letters result in no response or if the letter is returned undeliverable.**

**(d) Death**

**(e) Disability too severe or Institutionalization**

**In order to close a case as disability too severe or institutionalization there must be clear evidence in the case file documentation that the consumer will no longer benefit from services.**

**(f) Failure due to refusal to cooperate**

**In circumstances where the consumer has not met the IWTP responsibilities place upon them such as frequently missing appointments, disregarding instruction, and non-compliance with the VRT’s corrective action plans, the case may be closed as refusal to cooperate. Clear evidence of this must be documented in the case file.**

**(g) No impairment**

**Cases can be closed no impairment when:**

**1. At the time of assessment the VRT finds no impairment which limits their ability to travel independently and there is no supporting medical documentation.**

**2. In the course of instruction the consumer’s visual condition or disability improves to the point where they no longer impact daily functioning.**

**(h) Refused services or further services**

**Consumers have the option to refuse services at application, prior to initiation of the plan or after the plan has been initiated by the VRT.**

**8. COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES**

**8.1 In addition to planned services to consumers, VRT’s may be asked to present to agencies, physicians, organizations, or groups to promote awareness of available services to the community.**

**8.2 VRT’s may serve as consultant to schools, hospitals, and other organizations in working with consumers with the consent of their supervisor.**

**9. CONTRACT VRT SERVICES**

**9.1 In the event that AVRS is unable to serve a consumer needing VRT services, a contract VRT vendor may be utilized. Contract vendors must be certified with Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals for Vision Rehabilitation Therapists or the National Blindness Professional Certification Board in Rehabilitation Teaching for the Blind. Contractors must comply with the procedures and fee schedule set by the agency.**