

Vocational Rehabilitation Counselling

Overview

This section will cover the effect of spinal cord injury on work and/or school. It will provide information and resources on how to get started on setting career goals, understanding funding and employment options, and obtaining support to pursue your work or school goals.

- What is Vocational Rehabilitation Counselling at GF Strong?
- What's different about work or school now?
- What can I do about it?
- Who can help me?
- What resources are available?
- Conclusion

Introduction: What is Vocational Rehabilitation Counselling at GF Strong?

RESOURCE: [Link to Voc Rehab Brochure](#)

Since your spinal cord injury, you may be reviewing your work life in a way you have not done before. Even though physical abilities have been affected, you still have many job skills that employers value. Contact a vocational rehabilitation counsellor if you want some support around your employment concerns. Whether you want to explore ideas or are ready to start some serious planning, the counsellor will help.

Vocational Rehab Counsellors support persons with disabilities to:

- Plan for employment
- Maintain a job
- Return to work after injury
- Change jobs
- Pursue self-employment
- Understand disability benefits
- Adjust to a new role as a worker or non-worker

Vocational rehabilitation counsellors will help assess your job interests and skills, academic abilities, personal traits, and physical capabilities as related to work. They can help you to set career goals and define ways for you to achieve these goals.

If you are ready to go to work, the counsellor can help plan your approach when tackling the job market. If you are a student, the vocational rehabilitation counsellor will help coordinate other services that might include course counselling, attendant care, and funding for tuition, books, and special equipment. For those who decide to become self-employed – one of the fastest growing areas of job creation – the counsellor can provide information and recommendations for agencies that can assist individuals starting their own business.

What's different about work or school now?

MYTH: People with spinal cord injuries don't work.

FACT: Most people with spinal cord injury are capable of work in some capacity!

A change in your physical functioning may impact your ability to return to work. A Vocational Rehabilitation Counsellor will help you to consider your options starting with a return to your pre-injury job and exploring other alternatives as needed. This may include the following options:

1. Previous job – with same employer, possibly with accommodations
2. Different job – with same employer
3. Same or related job – with a different employer
4. New job – with new employer using transferable skills
5. Self-employment
6. Upgrading current skills or retraining
7. Non-competitive options – volunteer and recreation

We believe that returning to work and/or school is very important to clients' rehabilitation!

What can I do about it?

If you are planning to return to a previous job, connect with a Vocational Rehabilitation Counsellor and your HR department to assist with the return-to-work process once you are ready.

If you are exploring other work options, begin thinking about your past educational training and work experience. Also, you should consider personal strengths and abilities. Ask yourself what you enjoy doing and what you feel you do well. Understanding these factors can assist you in exploring employment options and how they can be used in the job market.

RESOURCE: WorkBC Explore Careers <https://www.workbc.ca/Jobs-Careers/Explore-Careers.aspx>

What is my role?

Vocational rehabilitation counsellors are dedicated to providing guidance and information to help you achieve your full potential. What it takes is commitment and opportunity. We believe you benefit from setting your own vocational goals.

Who can help me?

GF Strong Vocational Rehabilitation Services

Vocational rehabilitation services are available to clients who are already connected with GF Strong Rehab Centre, whether as an inpatient or as an outpatient. Please request that your physician or allied health professional (OT, PT, etc.) at GF Strong to refer you to Vocational Rehabilitation. If you are not a current client of the centre, you can be referred by your family doctor or specialist.

Private Employment Services

Depending on your situation, you may have access to private vocational rehabilitation services through the following agencies:

- ICBC – Case Managers may connect clients to vocational rehab services to help return to pre-injury level of employability. May include assessment, work strengthening and job accommodation supports; financial supports may also be available.
- WorkSafe BC – Provided to those with work-related conditions; vocational rehabilitation services including vocational assessment and planning, vocational counselling, work assessment, work-site job modifications, assistance with your job search, and skills development.
- Short & Long Term Disability (STD, LTD) – Provided through employer and insurance company to return workers to their pre-injury level of employment; for in-depth assistance with return to work, training, or job search, ask your STD/LTD Case Manager or Adjustor for a referral to the Vocational Rehab department of the insurance company.

RESOURCE : [WorkSafeBC Vocational Rehabilitation Guidebook file:///C:/Users/hsinclair2/Downloads/vr-brochure-5x8-final-lowres-pdf-en%20\(2\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/hsinclair2/Downloads/vr-brochure-5x8-final-lowres-pdf-en%20(2).pdf)

Public Employment Services

Additional related services are also available in your community to support you toward your goal of employment. WorkBC provides free employment services to all British Columbians who are eligible to work in Canada; they have offices throughout the province as well as online resources. Their services include helping people to explore career options, research local labour markets, connect with local employers, and apply for jobs. They also provide self-employment services to assist people with starting small businesses.

RESOURCES: [WorkBC home page https://www.workbc.ca/](https://www.workbc.ca/)

At WorkBC offices you will have access to Resource Centres with computers, copiers, phones, and support staff to answer job search-related questions. They offer workshops on important topics such as writing resumes and interview skills. WorkBC also provides Case Managers who are specialized in working with clients with disabilities to provide one-on-one job search assistance. On the WorkBC website, you will find the following resources:

- the most comprehensive database of B.C. job postings available;
- career tools that bring occupations to life;
- a blog featuring trends, job-search tips, employment programs and more;
- an interactive map of WorkBC Employment Services Centres across the province; and
- live chat for instant help with using the website and finding information.

Be sure to visit the WorkBC closest to where you live and bring your photo identification to register!

RESOURCE: [Find your local WorkBC Employment Services Centre https://www.workbc.ca/Employment-Services/WorkBC-Centres/Find-your-WorkBC-Employment-Services-Centre-\(1\).aspx](https://www.workbc.ca/Employment-Services/WorkBC-Centres/Find-your-WorkBC-Employment-Services-Centre-(1).aspx)

What resources are available?

Income Support Resources

If you are unable to work for an extended period, you may qualify for income supports. There are three public programs for financial support depending on your situation:

- EI Sickness Benefits – Supports qualified applicants for a maximum of 15 weeks; can be used to cover a temporary health condition.

<http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/sc/ei/benefits/sickness.shtml>

- Persons with Disabilities Benefits (PWD) – Supports people experiencing a severe physical or mental impairment that is expected to continue for more than two years.
<http://www.eia.gov.bc.ca/PUBLICAT/bcea/pwd.htm>
- CPP Disability Benefits – Supports people experiencing a “severe and prolonged” medical condition.
<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/benefits/publicpensions/cpp/cpp-disability-benefit.html>

Training Funding Resources

Depending on your situation, you may decide that retraining is your best option for returning successfully to employment. In that case, you may qualify for some financial support from the government to assist you with tuition and books/supplies; these supports are not loans and do not need to be repaid. Be sure to ask your Vocational Rehabilitation Counsellor or WorkBC Case Manager about which resources may be available in your situation.

Another possible source of education funding is through government grants and scholarships; these are not loans and do not need to be repaid. Grants and scholarships for specific student groups and specific education programs are available from the Province of BC through StudentAidBC. Some are assessed automatically when you apply for student loans, while others may require a separate application. You will find a listing of resources here: <https://studentaidbc.ca/explore/grants-scholarships>.

There are also grants and bursaries available from non-government sources specifically to assist with the cost of studying as a person with a disability. The National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) maintains a directory of financial aids at www.disabilityawards.ca; be sure to read the criteria for each award before applying as some are very specific.

Volunteering Resources

If returning to work is not in your immediate future, volunteering can be a very helpful step toward employment as well as an opportunity to participate in meaningful activity in your community. There are a wide range of volunteer positions that range from one-day events to ongoing weekly commitments and cover every kind of activity depending on your interests (examples include coaching, tutoring, gardening, driving, hiking, cooking, singing... the possibilities are endless!).

Many volunteer opportunities are posted online similar to regular job postings, and often also require an application process. Check out the following websites for comprehensive listings of volunteering opportunities in your area:

- Go Volunteer (<http://www.govolunteer.ca/>)
- Charity Village (<https://charityvillage.com/app/volunteer-listings>)

Conclusion

Returning to work or other meaningful activities such as volunteering and studying are an important aspect of your recovery from spinal cord injury. When you are ready to begin exploring your options, reach out to the people around you and the resources listed on this page to support you through the process.