

Early Reach and OVR at Brookwood: Unlocking Vocational Potential for Students

Maura L. Roberts, Ph.D. & Stephanie Geider 29
November -0001

Employing Students with Disabilities

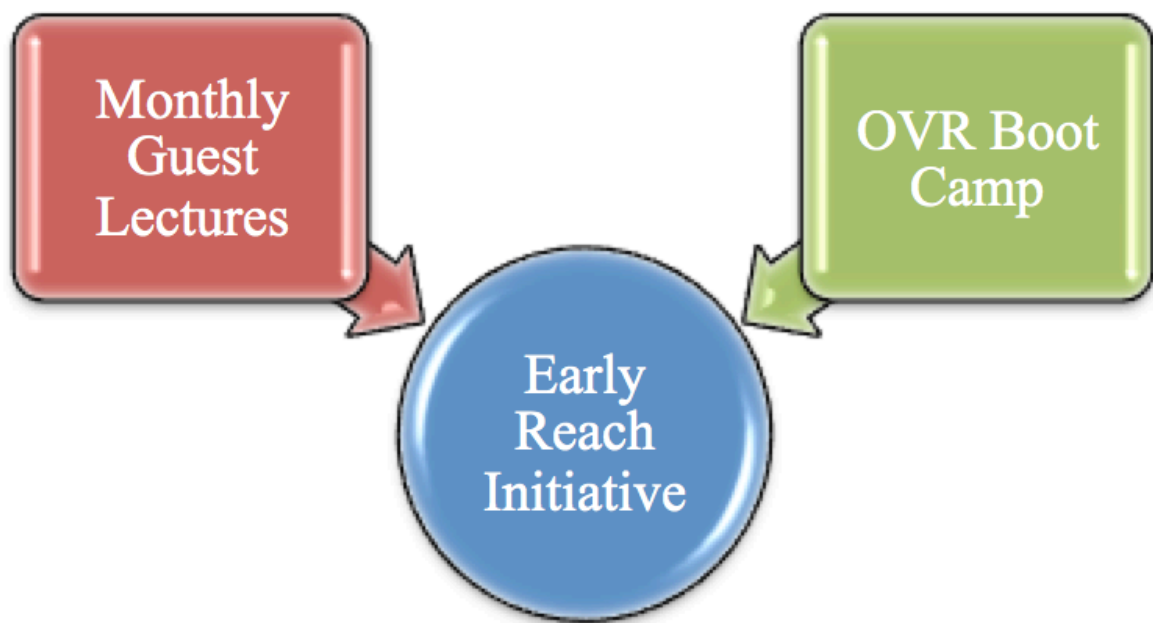
One of the largest issues facing people with special needs is potential for sustainable, meaningful, and productive employment. Recently, The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), places extensive emphasis on the achievement of competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities which is defined by providing: 1.) competitive earnings, 2.) integrated location in the community, and 3.) opportunities for advancement. In reality, however, many high school students with a disability need vocational guidance and assistance in preparing for, obtaining, or maintaining competitive employment. At Woods Services, the Brookwood School provides vocational and independent living training to students with disabilities. Specifically, the program is dedicated to helping students to prepare for competitive employment in the community.

Preparing Students for Employment

Over the past year, Brookwood School has partnered with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (OVR) provided through the Early Reach Initiative (ERI) and Transition to Work referrals in order to provide the necessary experiences for students to succeed vocationally. The goal of this partnership is to provide our students with additional experiences, knowledge, and skills needed to obtain competitive integrated employment and/or transition to post-secondary training. What follows is a brief overview of these partnerships and associated outcomes for students.

Early Reach Initiative

The Early Reach Initiative (ERI) is an outreach service through the OVR designed to ensure youth with disabilities have knowledge of, and can access, available services and supports to successfully transition into adult life. This year at Brookwood School, the ERI services provided monthly guest lectures, and students attended three days of OVR Bootcamp training (see diagram below).

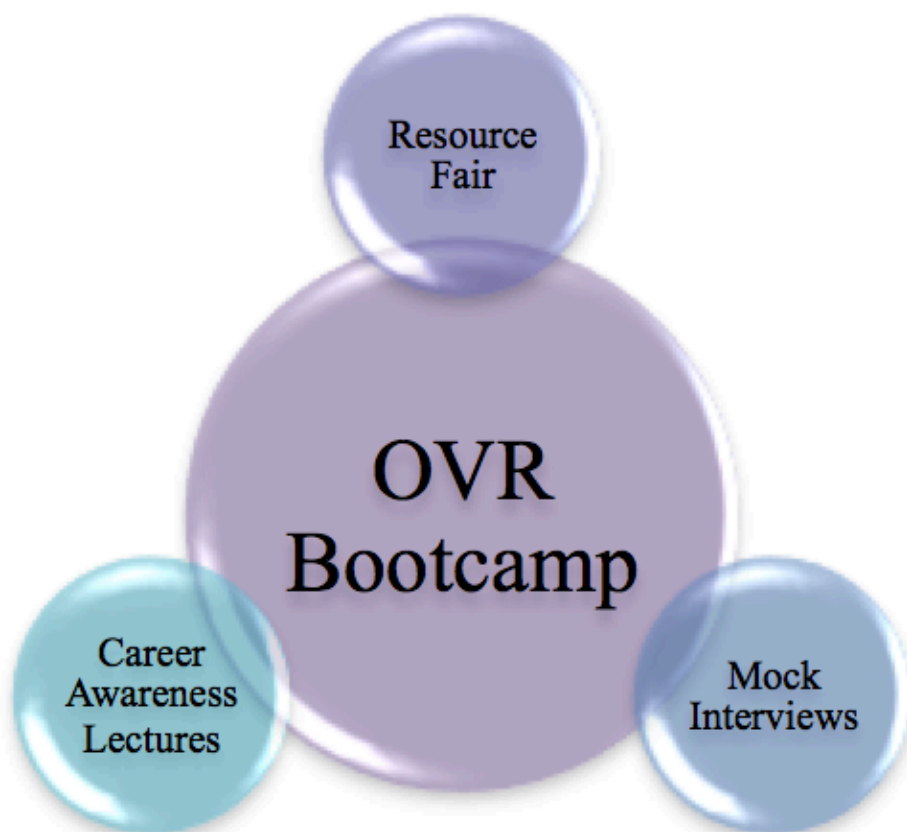


First, the ERI monthly guest lectures were designed to help students learn more about OVR services, disability awareness, communication, problem solving, professionalism, and networking (please see the chart below for examples of lectures and content provided to students during these lectures).

Examples of ERI Lectures and Associated Content	
Types of Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal versus Nonverbal Communication • Effective Communication Strategies • Enthusiasm and Attitude
OVR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission and Purpose • What is competitive employment? • Difference between entitlement versus eligibility
Networking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview and resume suggestions • 4 P's for Interviews- prepare, practice, present and post interview tips • Sample Interview Questions
Disability Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Different types of disabilities • Tips for discussing your disability with others • Self-advocacy

OVR Vocational Bootcamp

This year, Brookwood students participated in a variety of career explorations at OVR Vocational Bootcamp which was held at Delaware Valley University in Doylestown, PA. During this three-day event, students were presented with key information needed for a successful transition into the working world. Bootcamp was divided into three experiences for students: 1.) career awareness lecture series, 2.) resource fair and 3.) mock interviews (see diagram below).



First, Vocational Bootcamp offered students a variety of interactive lectures provided by different speakers which included; Darrell "Coach D" Andrews, a nationally recognized motivational speaker, Bryan Berchok, our Early Reach Coordinator, and local OVR office representatives. Lectures featured the following topics: professionalism,

disability awareness, focusing on ability not disability, and advocacy. At these lectures, students were encouraged to ask questions, and voice their concerns as they pertain to future employment and the obstacles they may face in gaining sustainable, meaningful, and productive employment. Second, students practiced interviewing with career professionals while dressed in professional attire. Second, students participated in mock interviews with professionals. Students were presented with real-life interview questions and professionals rated each student's performance based on a list of criteria. The students were also given feedback on their performance at the end of each interview. Lastly, students attended a Resource Fair with representatives from Bucks County Community College, Temple University, Arcadia University, and others to provide students with the opportunities to learn more about post-secondary training and educational programs.

Referrals to Transition from School to Work OVR Programs and Services

Ideally, students should be referred to OVR two years prior to graduation. The Woods Transition Coordinator, Stephanie Geider, works with families to submit referrals to OVR; this requires the permission of parents/guardians to become involved with OVR services when students are under the age of 18. Once OVR referrals are received and approved, OVR provides vocational rehabilitation services

to help the students prepare for, obtain, or maintain employment. In turn, OVR services helps our students overcome or lessen the impact of their disability by directly helping them prepare for a career. Students can receive services related to, but not limited to; career acquisition classes, job coaching, job shadowing, job training, and job placement in the community. In turn, the professionals at OVR research and provide community jobs that may otherwise not be available to our students.

OVR Partnership and Student Outcomes

Overall, the OVR partnership with Brookwood School provides many benefits to our students. Not only do these experiences provide students with a better understanding of their disability, these experiences also help to promote self-advocacy skills that can lead to employment.

Through these experiences, students get additional training to secure employment, as well as, exposure to different career opportunities in the community. Likewise, referrals to Transition from School to Work OVR Programs and Services is geared toward individualized support for each student related to his or her vocational goals.

Collectively, Brookwood School's partnership with OVR services is providing our students with experiences to gain knowledge and skills needed to obtain competitive integrated employment or transition to post-secondary training.

Author Bios

Maura Roberts is the Director of Brookwood School at Woods Services, in Langhorne, Pa. As the director, she has developed a transition program for students with disabilities which focuses on a) academic enrichment, b) socialization, c) independent living skills, and d) integrated work experiences and career skills that lead to gainful employment. Maura was trained as a school psychologist and graduated with her doctorate from Lehigh University and has over 30 years of experiences working with individuals with disabilities. She has also served as an administrator in both private and public schools developing curriculum and instruction programs and Multi-tiered System of Supports for academic and behavioral supports. She has also authored over 20 educational publications and has secured grant dollars from federal, state, and local funding agencies to support various educational projects.

Stephanie Geider is a Teacher (Art and Consumer Science) and is the Coordinator of Transition Services, OVR, and Title 1 for The Brookwood School at Woods Services. She holds a Level II certification and has a Bachelor of Science in Photography from Drexel University, an Art Education Certification from Kutztown University, and a Masters of Arts in Art Education from Edinboro University.