

Foreword

There is a well known demonstration that teaches about potential and priorities. It involves filling a bucket with sand, gravel, small stones, big rocks and water. If the sand, gravel and small stones are placed in the bucket first, there will be no room for all of the big rocks. If, on the other hand, the big rocks are placed in the bucket first, there will be room for all of the sand, all of the gravel, all of the small stones and in fact, there will be room to top it all off with water. The bucket will be filled to the brim and will accommodate all of the essential elements.

The big rocks in this exercise represent things that are truly important. The stones, gravel, sand and water represent items of lesser importance corresponding to the size or density of each element. The bucket is a finite space to be filled and could represent the twenty-four hours of a day or the limited hours a VR counselor has to spend with a consumer. That finite amount of time can be filled with truly important matters – the things that matter most – or it can be filled with a whole lot of less significant stuff.

This is the illustration that I used when charging the 29th Institute on Rehabilitation Issues Primary Study Group with the challenge of writing *Promoting Consumer Empowerment through Professional VR Counseling*. In working with VR consumers, the “big rocks” must include

- high quality employment in an integrated setting,
- consumer choice in life decisions and responsibility for choices made,
- elevated expectations on the part of VR professionals demonstrated through provision of information, education, training and confidence in consumers,
- physical and attitudinal barrier removal,
- an efficient, effective, less bureaucratic rehabilitation system,
- a disability and rehabilitation community that is united in partnerships that support consumer empowerment.

It is my sincere hope that the Primary Study Group has included the “big rocks” in this document and that readers will use it as a tool to assure VR consumers’ lives are filled with the things that matter most. Together we must assure that the “big rocks” form the foundation of successful and empowering VR services.

Joanne Wilson, Commissioner
Rehabilitation Services Administration

Preface

This document is the result of a year-long effort by the members of the 29th Institute on Rehabilitation Issues (IRI) Primary Study Group on “Promoting Consumer Empowerment Through Professional VR Counseling.” We have compiled this document in collaboration with the participants of the 29th IRI National Conference held in Washington, DC, May 2003. We have worked under the leadership of Mr. Carlos Serván (Nebraska Commission for the Blind), the Chair of our Study Group, and Mrs. Jeanne Miller (University of Arkansas RCEC), our University Coordinator. We appreciate their leadership and the support of Ms. Carri George, who is also at the University of Arkansas.

We hope the positions, proposals and resources in this document will encourage and support the empowerment of all participants in the rehabilitation counseling process.