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A Century of Serving People with Disabilities

- 2021 marks the 100th anniversary of the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation (USOR).
- USOR holds the distinction of starting one of the first vocational rehabilitation programs in the country.

Origins of the VR Program

- VR programs got their start in 1920 with the passage of the Smith-Fess Act (also known as the Civilian Vocational Rehabilitation Act).
- The basic purpose of the program has remained consistent since its inception; to help people with disabilities obtain employment, increase their independence and participate in their communities.

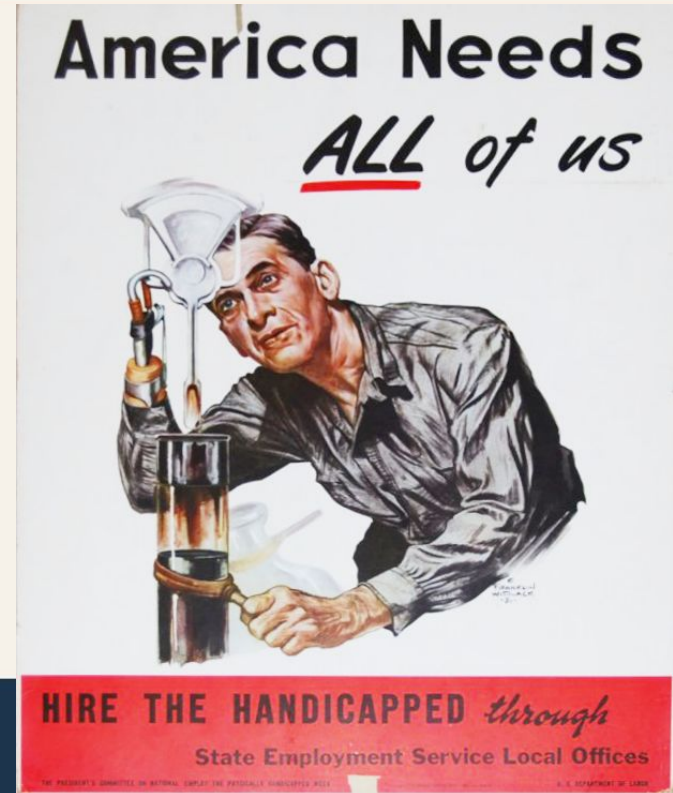
1920 SMITH FESS CIVILIAN VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION ACT

- Patterned after the Soldiers Rehab Act 1918
 - Assisting injured soldiers returning home after WWI
- Established the Federal-State program in rehabilitation
- Services: only basic job training, guidance/counseling, prosthetics, job placement
- Served only physical impairments
- Time-limited grant, initially not permanent program
- Before the first decade of Utah VR concluded, more than 1,000 Utahns were aided through the VR



Turning Point

- As the U.S. entered World War II, the increasing demand for industrial production provided ample employment opportunities for those with disabilities.
- Attitudes of employers started changing during the war effort and businesses became more conscious that people with disabilities were very loyal, dependable and efficient workers.



Program Expansion

- By the 50s & 60s, the agency expanded to include specialized programs for the Blind and Visually Impaired, and the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
- The VR program evolved to become more inclusive of all disability types, including mental health and individuals with significant developmental /cognitive disabilities.



Disability Rights & Self-Advocacy

- The Civil Rights Movement also paved way for a focus on the rights of people with disabilities; including equal rights and equal access.
- Client Centered Services
 - This includes more focus on education, assistive technology and independent living supports.



The Governor's Committee

- Utah was also one of the first states to create a Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities.
- This committee worked to support workforce integration of people with disabilities, along with educating employers on disability awareness, accessing hiring resources and supporting employment initiatives in local communities throughout the state.
- This mission continues today, in coordination with USOR Business Relations Unit.



USOR at 100

- Today, USOR assists approximately 50,000 individuals with disabilities each year through its core programs
 - Vocational Rehabilitation
 - Division of Services of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
 - Division of Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired
 - Disability Determination Services

Current Challenges for PWDs

- Higher unemployment rate
- Myths and misconceptions about the ADA and Accommodations in education and employment settings
- Negative attitudes towards disabilities, especially mental health
- Housing, transportation and health care barriers
- Limited job readiness opportunities for youth with disabilities



USOR's Priorities

- Improving workforce access for people with disabilities (PWDs)
- Supporting and educating Utah businesses on hiring/retaining PWDs
- Expanding Pre-Employment Transition Services for students with disabilities
- Increasing skill gain and educational attainment of PWDs
- Increasing long-term earning potential of PWDs
- Assisting individuals earning subminimum wages (i.e. sheltered workshops) transition to competitive employment.

How You Can Help

- Join Disability IN: Utah
- Serve on the Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities
- Attend Employer Workshops on Hiring PWDs (March & September)
- Attend the Work Ability Job Fairs (April & October)
- Host Disability Mentoring Events, Tours or Career Days for youth
- Recruit qualified, job ready people with disabilities through our Choose to Work program
- Partner with USOR to provide on-the-job training and work-based learning experiences
- Include disability in your Divisity, Equity and Inclusion initiatives

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USOR 100: Celebrating a Century of Vocational Rehabilitation and Services to People with Disabilities

2021 marks the 100th anniversary of the Utah State office of Rehabilitation (USOR). Utah has regularly led the nation in providing services for people with disabilities and holds the distinction of starting one of the first vocational rehabilitation programs in the country.

Vocational rehabilitation programs got their start in 1920 with the passage of the Smith-Fess Act (also known as the Civilian Vocational Rehabilitation Act) that established the Vocational Rehabilitation program for Americans with disabilities.

Utah and five other states set up a vocational rehabilitation program the following year in 1921. In the first two years of vocational rehabilitation in Utah, 50 residents with disabilities were successfully employed. Of those initial 50, 15 participants were blind and two who were deaf. [more](#)



USOR Employee Spotlight



USOR Throughout the Years



USOR Success Stories

<https://jobs.utah.gov/usor/overview/usor100.html>