



OVR Customer takes her case for employment to the law (field)

When Ana Smith developed a disability 13 years ago, she had to have surgery that prevented her from returning to her job as a lock box supervisor for a local bank. After her health improved and she was able to return to work, she realized that her skills were outdated and felt that her ability to sell herself to an employer was also gone. She knew she had to do something. That's when she took her case to the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation and eventually found a lawyer who helped her get a job — not through litigation — by hiring her!

Smith had a plan to make herself “marketable” again and the process started with the help of OVR Philadelphia District Office Counselor Jack Dankanich.



LEGAL EAGLES — Anna Smith, seated, at work with her employer, Attorney Teresa Brady. Smith now works as a legal secretary after help she received from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, Liberty Resources and The Sierra Group, Inc.

One of the first steps toward Smith meeting her goal was her enrollment at the Liberty Resources' Workplace Technology Training Academy (Liberty Resources is the Center for Independent Living in Philadelphia). At the academy, the team of Dankanich; Linda Richman, director of the Workplace Technology Training Academy; and Michael Fiore of The Sierra Group, Inc. — a nationally acclaimed rehabilitation engineering consulting firm that provides assistive technology services to employers and persons with disabilities, designed a comprehensive plan that outlined classes Smith would need along with strategies for internships and accommodations to help her reach her goal of returning to full time employment, either in banking or as an administrative assistant.

After taking courses such as Introduction to Computers, Advanced Computers, Keyboarding, Business Communication and “Taking the Next Step,” Smith developed a specific blueprint for finding a job. Using a job lead provided by the Sierra Group, Smith interned as a secretary for the Law Offices of Teresa Brady in Philadelphia where she was able to showcase her updated skills. At the end of her internship she was immediately hired. With a little more help from OVR, which provided funding for on the job training to be a legal secretary, Smith is now working in a job she loves — and the feeling is mutual.

“I needed someone who was sharp, dependable, and a quick learner as well,” Attorney Teresa Brady said. “Anna [Smith] has met and exceeded all of my expectations. She is a key player in my successful law practice and accommodating her needs didn't cost me anything. The process was made easy because OVR and The Sierra Group coordinated my access to all of the necessary resources.”

Brady also added that Smith's kind manners, professionalism and excellent computer skills were deciding factors in her success.

Through negotiation, collaboration and partnering, everyone brought their expertise to the table to help Anna Smith achieve her goals. The Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation worked side by side with public/private partners like the Sierra Group and the Workplace Technology Training Academy at Liberty Resources for several years joining resources to meet the needs of the business community in finding qualified job applicants and meeting the needs of OVR customers with disabilities seeking careers.

For more information on public/private partnerships, visit: www.state.pa.us PA Keyword: “disability services.”

