



## TBI Therapy Disciplines

# Vocational Opportunities

Following a traumatic brain injury

By Kirstin Olmstead, Staff Writer & Nicole Rondini, MS, OTR

A traumatic brain injury can have a devastating effect on almost all areas of a survivor's life. It can cause physical impairments or weaknesses limiting strength, endurance, or the ability to use both sides of the body. Cognitive skills are often impaired, affecting memory, concentration, or ability to problem solve. Behavioral changes may also occur limiting the ability to follow directions, accept feedback, or obey rules. Physical abilities, cognitive abilities and behavioral control are all necessary for workplace success and often make rehabilitation following a TBI very challenging. Vocational rehabilitation often is necessary for TBI survivors so they can gain and retain meaningful work.

At Rainbow, vocational specialists help individuals achieve educational and vocational success through placement in a variety of work and academic settings. The approach they take is far from cookie cutter.

It's a constant balancing act to place individuals with brain injuries in environments they will find manageable and challenging.

Since Rainbow offers varying degrees of work opportunities, Rainbow Vocational Specialists handle placements ranging from community-based employment and volunteer work to educational training. They also manage placements at Rainbow Industries Production Company (RIPCo), a nonprofit organization featuring a sheltered workshop. In addition, the vocational team coordinates in-house work opportunities such as cashier and stock work at both the Corner Café (*serving Rainbow's Ypsilanti Treatment Center*) and the RIPCo Bistro (*serving the RIPCo Vocational facility*).

### ***Determining Employment Options for Adults***

Upon entering Rainbow's Vocational Program, each candidate goes through an assessment process to help ascertain career goals, skills, abilities and interests. When necessary, a "Functional Capacity Assessment" may

## Sheltered Workshop

Rainbow Industries Production Company (RIPCo) offers a sheltered workshop where clients are able to work at various jobs. A sheltered workshop provides employment opportunities for people with disabilities or those returning to the workforce after a period of rehabilitation. The word 'sheltered' refers to a protective environment where individuals can undertake paid meaningful employment in a supportive setting.

*Pictured below: Nerico Johnson works on assembling an Adirondack chair. Pictured left: Mitchell Anderson works on car detailing.*



## Enclave Training

As part of Rainbow's vocational enclave training, work opportunities are available at the Corner Café (pictured left.) An enclave is a training program where individuals with traumatic brain injuries (disabilities) work in a community setting while supported and supervised by vocational specialists. Enclaves can be used as short-term skill building sites before a community job placement or they can provide long-term employment for individuals with more severe disabilities.

Located at Rainbow's Ypsilanti Treatment Center, clients running the Corner Café are responsible for cashier and customer service duties, as well as pricing and stocking an assortment of snacks and beverages available for purchase. *Pictured left: Karin Minsel makes change for a snack purchase.*



## Vocational Opportunities

be performed to determine physical limitations so therapists can work on compensatory strategies and help build stamina.

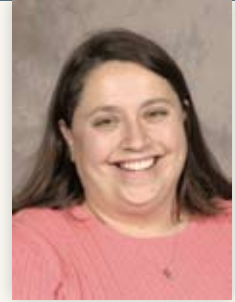
Once abilities have been assessed, specialists determine an appropriate job placement. Counseling may be needed in order to help individuals overcome employment fears and job coaches may help identify community mentors so that clients have someone to go to for additional help. Specialists also assist in creating resumes and help prep job seekers for interviews. *“Sometimes our clients need coaching and follow-along services once they are placed,”* said Laurie Cooke, a Rainbow Vocational Specialist. *“That entails contacting the employer on a regular basis to ensure things are going OK.”* Specialists must also understand the impact of paid employment on government programs such as Social Security Disability (SSD) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI), so they can educate clients and guardians about reporting requirements.

## Vocational Specialist Bio

**Laurie Cooke** — Vocational Specialist at Rainbow Rehabilitation Centers Inc.

**Education:** B.S. degree in Interpersonal Communications from Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

**Experience/Specialty:** Following her graduation, Laurie worked for Goodwill Industries located in Jackson, Michigan before joining Rainbow as a Vocational Specialist. She has worked in the field of vocational services since 1995. Her specialization is in case management, pre-vocational skills, training and job placement. She has been certified as an Employment Training Specialist since 1997.



### *A Team Approach to Therapy*

Although many people come to Rainbow having already specified an interest in the Vocational Program, the process also requires identifying individuals who may be ready to work in some capacity but may not yet realize it. During monthly meetings, interdisciplinary therapy teams come together to discuss strategies for vocational and educational preparation. For example, if a client is interested in pursuing a GED or college courses, occupational therapists

and speech therapists will coordinate with vocational specialists to enhance specific skills such as reading or memory recall. The vocational team also utilizes community resources within educational institutions such as local high schools, community colleges and universities.

*“Work is an important rehabilitation stepping stone following a brain injury,”* said Laurie. *“It often is an essential part of recovery.”* ❖

## Vocational Rehabilitation Brochure

A traumatic brain injury brings a unique set of challenges — among these is the pursuit of employment. At Rainbow Rehabilitation Centers, we provide a continuum of vocational services for individuals with brain injuries. We offer varying levels of support for each person that is appropriate to his or her skill level and ability. Our goal is to help individuals progress to their greatest level of independence while providing them with the assistance they need every step of the way.

For a free brochure call or log on to ...

**1.800.968.6644**

[www.rainbowrehab.com](http://www.rainbowrehab.com)

