

Transcript of “Rights Here, Rights Now” - Episode on DVBI- with Dr. Rick Mitchell and Pam Cato

Produced by the disAbility Law Center of Virginia.

[INTRO]: **The information provided on this podcast does not, and is not intended to, constitute legal advice. Instead, all information, content and materials available are for general informational purposes only.**

[Enter host, Valerie Jones]:

[Valerie Jones]: Today (on the podcast), **we have Pam Cato & Dr. Rick Mitchell**, from DBVI, talking about the services they provide, inviting us, and providing us, with a ton of information about, school, employment, Assistive Technology, [AT]. So, listen up, you'll see exactly what I'm talking about! Welcome Rights Here, Rights Now, the podcast about disability, advocacy, and activism. I'm your advocate host, Valerie Jones.

[Enter host, Laura Sinclair]:

[Laura Sinclair]: And I'm your Advocate host, Laura Sinclair!

[Valerie Jones]: Every two weeks we dig into to relevant issues, current events, and avenues for self-advocacy.

[Laura Sinclair]: 'Cause someone has to.

[Valerie Jones]: And, it might as well be us!

[Laura Sinclair]: ***This podcast is produced and edited by the disAbility Law Center of Virginia, the**

**Commonwealth's protection and advocacy agency
for disability rights. Find out more at DLCV.org**

[Enter, once again, hosts Valerie Jones and Laura Sinclair]:

[Valerie Jones]: But, before we jump in, let's check out disability in the News.

Today, August 24th is the start of the Paralympics. They will be held in Tokyo and begin August 24th at 7 EST. Over 4,000 athletes from 160 countries are participating and this will be the biggest ever Paralympic games. You can watch on NBCOlympics.com and on the NBC Sports App. This year there will be over 22 sports from rowing, cycling, sitting volleyball, and wheelchair tennis. For the first time badminton and taekwondo have been added. The Paralympic games will be hosted for the next 13 days in Tokyo. 234 athletes from Team USA will be competing, including 161 returning athletes. We hope you tune in and we can't wait to see what happens!

[Valerie Jones]: Good morning, Pam. Thank you for being here. Dr. Rick Mitchell, thank you for being here. They are from DBVI. And we have some questions we would like you to answer. And clarify myths about. I'm not sure who will answer this but, um- Can you tell me: What is the purpose, of DVBI?

[Enter first guest, Dr. Rick Mitchell]

[Dr. Rick Mitchell]: I- I'll take that question: The purpose of DBVI, is probably wrapped up best in our mission statement, where it says: The DBVI is an agency of the Commonwealth of Virginia that is dedicated to its mission of providing services- dedicated to its mission of providing services and resources to Virginians that are blind, vision impaired, and deaf blind, to achieve their desired level of employment, education, and Personal Independence. And, we do that through- [...]uh,- We have two divisions: We have the services division that I'm the Deputy Commissioner over, and then, we have our Enterprise Division. And let me just give you a brief

description of the Enterprise division. They are focused on ****actually creating**** employment opportunities, for Virginians, that are blind and vision-impaired, and deaf blind, and they do that to their two manufacturing plants one is in Richmond and one is in Charlottesville. They also do that through a number of retail stores, food service operations, and contract management positions, that are located throughout the state. And then, the services division that I can certainly speak a great deal to. But, let me just give you a quick overview of our service division we have our vocational rehabilitation program that Pam is our director of. We are also in there have our business relations program, which really is providing services to business as well as the individuals we serve. And Rehab teaching, Independent Living, really directs its services towards helping people achieving being able to live independently through activities of daily living in personal home management. Then we'll have our education services program that really provide services from birth through high school graduation, or, age 21. And. they are really more of a consultation service, whether, mentoring programs, that are working with Children and Youth or to the actual school system, itself. And then we can we'll also have our own low vision program. Which, really, gets into using magnification for people that have low vision. And we'll do that to a team of low vision doctors as well as our staff show me what are the best types of magnifiers for individuals to be able to use to enhance their visions the highest level possible. Our Orientation and Mobility Program will teach people how to use the long white cane and travel independently using the white cane. then we'll have our rehab technology program that provides services to an assistive technology. [You're probobably very familiar with...] [...] text image, (&) enlarging scanners, that will scan documents. And then, read them back out. And we can also, get into electronic magnification, such as CCT light program provides the unique services to individuals that are deaf-blind. And then, our Virginia Rehabilitation Center for the Blind and Vision-impaired, is a center-based program. I call it that, basically, anyway. It's almost like somebody put the program that's on steroids. OR, it's your fast track a way to gain skills of blindness. People can come there. We have a residential facility, with 34 beds, come and stay, or, for those people that

are local; And, we also do it as a commuter program of people come Monday through Friday, eight hours a day, and, (they) receive the various training to help them to be able to achieve your employment educational goals as well as personal Independence. And then, finally: We have our library and Resource Center, which provides talking books recorded books for a pleasure reading. They'll also provide Braille textbooks, and large print textbooks, to the school systems. And, at least 10 different programs that fall into services division really does help individuals achieve their personal level of their desired level of employment education and personal Independence.

[Laura Sinclair]: Okay...oh, WOW, so you have covered a lot of ground [here]. It's amazing, you know, to think about all the many resources that you have available! And, the fact that you can just share them all like that with us tells us just how much more there must be on top of that. So, these services sound amazing. J And, who is eligible to participate, in the services with DBVI?

[Dr. Rick Mitchell]: Any individual that is having difficulty with their vision, um, is certainly eligible. And, eligibility criteria for each of the programs, are a little different-- it is-- based upon vision of the individual, as well as, functional limitations that the person may have. So, what I've always told about people I've been with the agency now for going on thirty six years, and, what I've always told people is: Don't assume that you're not eligible; if you're having problems with your vision- please call us- please reach out to us and we will determine if you're eligible for our services. And even, for a person that is intelligible that's experiencing a deteriorating on condition, they may not be eligible at the moment! but we can certainly let them know about the services that will be eligible to them once the other vision reaches certain thresholds. And, they start having some more *functional* limitations.

[Valerie Jones]: Okay. Thank you for the information. So, I know you talked about the services you provide- Can you explain how would one *apply* for these services? With DBVI?

[Dr. Rick Mitchell]: but I can you explain how would one apply for these Services I think they can go to our agency web page which is VDB VI. Org so for jigna Department blind vision impaired bbb.org and on that first paycheck come to there's a link that Supply now and it's just basic information to person has to put down their name contact information where they live and it's important to indicate where they live because we have six different Regional Offices across the state and so they can once we know where they lived in will refer them to the appropriate office also let me give you an 800 number- it's 800-622-2155 again that's 1 800-622-2155. If you call that number, they'll ask, the operator will ask you, where you live. And then, they will connect you to the regional office. And our six Regional Offices- Or, let me start out there, in: Far Southwest Virginia, you have Bristol, Roanoke, Stanton, Fairfax, Richmond, & Norfolk. And, each of those Regional Offices cover(s) actually very large territory. But then, once you reach out to that office, we have an intake specialist, in each office. They will reach out to see the individuals that are needing Services, as well as, some basic information, to determine, you know, what type of programs they may need. Whether it's, -- they are-- We have teaching, if it's somebody who just looking for you not being able to live more independently, in the home. Or, if they're interested in employment, they would then be referred to take the vocational rehab program, and a vocational rehabilitation. Or, if it's someone maybe an student, or, someone within the school system, then, they would be referring to our education program. And, often times, an individual may be referred to multiple programs all at the same time.]

[Valerie Jones]: Um, just a quick question, [for clarification]: When (if) someone were to reach out to them how long does that process take??

[Dr. Rick Mitchell]: At a minimum of 15 days. But historically, office staff tend to reach out pretty quickly. The intake specialist, they tend to reach out within the same week that they give that call.

[Valerie Jones]: Thank you.

[Laura Sinclair]: For folks who are newly diagnosed and really aren't sure what to expect- When they approach DBVI, & they apply for services-- What kinds of services might one have access to, or experience, in the early days and everything might be new. Or someone's unsure what even to ask for where does one start with this?

[Dr. Rick Mitchell]: They start with an intake specialist. And, across the state, all of our intake specialists, have been around for a number of years. So they're good, and [at] just, talking with the person, giving them some basic information. And often, we will start with the rehab teacher. And, it's, really, though, dependent upon the situation who will be the first person to reach out, because, all of our staff certainly know all of our different resources. And, what is available so if somebody for example let's say it's some 70 year old that is in someone in our older population. They would then probably be referring to a rehab teacher, initially. But, if, it's somebody that is still working. And let's say that they're 35 40 years old, and, maybe they're they're working somewhere in the information technology area. They would be preferred first to the vocational rehab counselor because of their-- often times, somebody that is working, you know, and, that's their first concern. And, they want to be able to maintain that job. And so, we would come in with all the various programs, and resources, that we have, to ensure that person is able to maintain their employment. And maintain, (and give them!), whatever skills they need to be able to continue working. Because, it's much easier to keep somebody in a job, and working, rather than, necessarily, you know, having to, go back out and start all over, new, with a new employer.

[Valerie]: *Thank you for that.* So, I did hear you mention earlier about assistive technology- Could you please let us know if **there's any assistive technology training?**

[Dr. Rick Mitchell]: Yes. We do that in a number of different ways.

In our field offices we have a number of phones, and, computer tutors. And, they are, basically, independent contractors with us, but, we have screened

them, to make sure that they understand, the various software developer jobs. And, [that they have] [...] that they have the necessary skills and understanding of that program... So that, they can teach somebody else. But, not only do they need to understand the assistive technology, and, how it works. They also have to have good teaching skills. And so, you're, they are, evaluated. And then, once the person is evaluated, (to) make sure that they have the necessary skills, and then, they're placed on our what we call: Our Computer Tutor Network. And then, the Regional Offices can reach out to their various tutors, and contract with them, Those tutors will go into the home and teach people. But, they also do it via a virtual means, as well. Because of everything with covid-19, last year, that was the primary way of constructing individuals, to learn, how to use this, to use, the assistive technology. And we have found it to be very effective, that the person could even do that proved virtual means and teach people, to know their A.T., Assistive Technology. Again, if you're interested in learning to do it on a faster level, [along with other skills] then, you can come to our for the Virginia Rehabilitation Center, for the Blind and Vision-impaired, and receive training as well. (But), if it's just assistive technology, though, that the person is needing, then, they would need to function as a commuter student. Because it's an 8-hour program, in a day, we're not able to teach people just assistive technology. They need to be in other classes, as well, at the center. But...We have two ways of doing it: At the center, or through our Tutor Network.

[Laura Sinclair]: You know- We [you] just spoke a lot about the different kinds of assistive technology training you offer. And I'm curious, to know, about employment! How do clients receive AT, that can help them on the job? And, are they trained on the job with someone alongside? Do they prepare ahead of time? Or whatever. Maybe even, some examples of, ways that people have figured out accommodations to help them do their work using A.T.?

[Dr. Rick Mitchell]: Way we will do that is, through our I mentioned earlier one of our programs, is the rehabilitation technology program and we have for Rehab technology specialist across state. And what they will do is if it's an employment situation they won't go in and actually

evaluate the what what is—needed-- And then, make the recommendations, as far as the equipment goes. Then, once the equipment arrives , then, we switch over. I mentioned our tutor Network. we will then switch over to tutor- and then the tutor will provide training to that individual on how to use the assistive technology. So, it's really a dual approach using multiple resources that we have.

[Valerie Jones]: Thank you for that information. For services that you have available- Are they available to High School students?

[Enter second guest, Pam Cato]

[Pam Cato]: **Okay, so, I'll take that question! And absolutely!** The dbvi Vocational Rehabilitation program, can start working with students, um, at age 14. So, that's usually right at that Freshman in High School.

[Valerie Jones]: Thank you for that I'm so are you going to just a follow-up to understand it... So, they're not available, like, from middle school children? That's *definitely* High School?

[Pam Cato]: Yeah, so, starting at age 14, so, again- In our agency we do have Educational Services. Like Dr. Mitchell mentioned, to, to help with that liaison, and work. But, resources through the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, when we start talking about preparing for employment, starts at age 14!

[Valerie Jones]: Okay. Thank you for that clarification, Pam. J

[Laura Sinclair]: So: When people are ready to prepare for employment, you know. You've mentioned different types of A.T. (Assistive Technology), you have, different types of training. What are specific skills that you find come up, again and again, that are really especially important to emphasize?? And then: How did... Are you able to advocate on behalf of clients to employers?

I know that I'm working with you all a little bit on the state Council that you worked really closely with. And,

businesses in the state to make room for jobs and for people who need help and you need career options. And, of course, to show, you know, what kind of value people bring to these jobs that employers can look for. And hope for. So. how do you help to prepare for employment? And, how do you work on the business side to make a, you know, a lasting, happy connection there?

[Pam Cato]: Sure... Let me ask a clarifying question? Or, are you talking, specifically, for the students that we were on? Or you just want overall in general how we help prepare for employment and interface with this like, with business?

[Laura Sinclair]: Both, I think. Those are both great areas right thanks for clarifying them/defending them? J

[Pam Cato]: So, why don't we start, you know... A lot of the services are similar.. for both students and ADULTS. They're great services. That, these are, available for students, that I think really helps. And if we START OUT out early, and often, working with students, and indicators for employment success in adulthood...So we have something within our VR program called pre-employment transition services that are big focus for for students with these are going to be for young people aged 14 to 21. If they're still in high school we can provide these services through age 22! Really helping you know that the student understand you know what career fields, and areas, and things are most interested in. And would like to learn more about. And, absolutely, to provide, work-based learning experiences so you know this can be: paid, or unpaid, it can be volunteer, and that can be so critical, for employment opportunities for post-secondary right? J So, post-high school education training, and, we really want to make sure we keep at the forefront of the guidance and counseling. And that, the students receive a lot of her students going to need some type of Workplace Readiness Training to help them develop those social skills and again focus on those Independent Living Skills. And, as Dr. Mitchell mentioned, that, [so,] there is is instructions how do you make choices for themselves and then to that in an appropriate way that'll lead to success so you're these are all things that we really focus on with our students Just because ,

once they, get a little older and they're out of school, or, you know, WHETHER, they're considered a youth or an adult- We still can provide, you know, great job exploration counseling. Great work based learning opportunities- *in all of those things*-. BUT, we certainly for our student synthesized these, students and adults, of course, **have access to the full range of your services that might be necessary to help them prepare for, and SECURE, employment. And, YOU ASKED ABOUT the work with businesses.** And, we have a Business relations team and I think I said that she knows one of their primary roles is engagement business knowing what opportunities building connections and developing relationships with it when we have someone you know I don't job seekers in our pipeline will have relationships ready to go on but they also work directly with the individual served by the VR program to again provide information on the labor market on what education or training or credentials are required for a specific goal to help prepare and them along with the counselor in in pants to make a good first impression! So all types of things, [that] our business to really help develop those opportunities and help represent themselves to those employers.

[Valerie Jones]: Thank you for that. So, um, so- Finally, I just would like to know, as far as higher education- With traditional Higher Education: What does the services look like for the training and educational [services]? Can you tell me more about that?

[Pam Cato]: Sure. Sure. So I think what was always important to know here, is: All of our services are very individualized. So, if someone works with our counselor, *everyone works with their counselors*, and, they could have talked about, you know, what is it what is that employment is important, and why, *and then explore additional education training that may be necessary* to achieve, right? And so, you know, for one person that wants to work in the accounting field. Well, they're going to need, at a **minimum, maybe a bachelor's in accounting.** So [then], we're going to be talking about college training. For the next person, you know, they may be really interested in, some of the STEM and IT related fields- That might include credentials, or, a business are

telling us what they want. Or, [telling us] these IT credentials and that's really important you were going to help them map out what they're training program and or other education would look like we also have another when I come more of that should I smoke a short rainy to somebody wants a career in logistics you know we have some great vacation training programs that we can Target for them is very individualized depends on the goal-oriented work with their counselor. And, you, again, determine what is the best path to help them achieve their success.

[Dr. Rick Mitchell]: Let me just say, that, also, having been at this organization now, for, for, about 36 years-- I started out with the agency as a VR counselor, and, and back then I knew pretty much then having a College Education was certainly, the way that someone would be able to achieve anything, and pretty much, live independently. And also, while having a having a good income. But, in the last few years, as Pam talked about, some credentials, are something else that we are now looking at. Because often times, someone can pursue, you know, very specific credentials, and be able to achieve, really good paying jobs without necessarily having to go through a college. [On the Workforce Development Board—he's on] a lot of it, is talking about credentials, in these high-demand occupations. And so, we have certainly looking at a lot of different career pathways, historically, for people that are blind, and vision-impaired you have to pursue a college degree-- If you wanted to have a really good paying job. But, the playing field is changing. And so, we're certainly adapting, to that, as well. J

[Pat Cato]: I'd like to just piggy back here. And say that, we want people to know, how to make the best choices. **And sometimes, we don't know what we don't know. And so, that's why, focusing first on,** you know, *WHERE*, you would be, in the end....is to really, actually start with the end of the beginning [start from the END GOAL]. So, where do we want to be you know what is the best fit for us as far as a career goal and then....

What's the path to get there? And (then) sometimes, it's not what we initially thought it might be; But, we're open to what is going to best set that

individual up to be successful. And we have resources to do that which has I think one of my favorite things ABOUT our VR Program.

[Laura Sinclair]: **I love that.** And, I love that you all seem to cover you know so many different kinds of services at all really interconnect Riley kids it's hard to serve someone if you're really isolating one part and then everyone's doing different isolated cards and you all really seem to weave together you know of. From entry into Services all the way through training helping with education helping to find job placement with local businesses it seems like you must have a lot of collaboration with all different agencies like I know dr. Mitchell just mention working with Workforce Development board's you know who are some Partners you work with that you feel together able to especially advocate for the needs of your clients who receive your services?

[Pam Cato]: You want me to take that one, Rick?

[Dr. Rick Mitchell]: Go ahead!

[Pam Cato]: So we have lots of Community Partners and other state agency partners that we work with.

And you know I would say for individuals that experience, you know a variety of disabilities, really, to enhance that, we are working collaboratively. And with that, starts with, the General Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, For those individuals, so, that the partnership that I think is critical! Because, we each bring, with, our programs.... We bring different skill sets in. And diff. abilities together. So, I think we have a lot of success there. And, we were getting, you know, job centers, near the career Works centers around the stage. And again- ***I think it's important to know that those services are available for all Virginians that are job-seeking and so we are working collaboratively. And,*** to me collaboratively, is to make sure that the individuals that are blind, or blind, deaf, vision impaired. They'll find access to those services, through our Partnerships. And, in our businesses, you know, we have a we participate again with DARS, with a federal job ORG. And people are

getting just amazing jobs, and ,with the federal government. We have state employment initiatives, who, were working again with other state agencies and in their HR department in hiring. J So you know, and, one Focus we had this year is looking at registered apprenticeships in Virginia. And in, in, the Department of Labor and Industry, [.....] [.....] serve us or the folks that we work with to decide if we [.....] We definitely try to understand, what all the resources are, and you know, to work with them.

[Valerie Jones]: Thank you so much for that information! But, one more time: Can you please provide the your contact information, [for], to the audience, to the listening audience, so they know how to contact you, if they should need you?

[Dr. Rick Mitchell]: Our toll-free number is 800-622-2155. Again: 800-622-2155. And our web address is a v d d v i. Org. Virginia Department blind vision impaired So it's DBVI.org. *And there's a link there that says apply now.*

[Valerie Jones]: Thank you for the information. And, thank you so much for coming on to our Podcast, and give the listening audience some amazing information, & resources they can follow up with!

[Dr. Rick Mitchell]: Thank you for having us we're having us- It was our pleasure.

[Pam Cato]: Thank you!

[Valerie Jones]: And now, a dLCV Highlight!

Gladys has been involved in the political process since she was old enough to vote. She avidly follows the candidates and issues. Gladys has a developmental disability and communicates with a computer device. She needs help with daily activities and making medical decisions. Her mom and sister help her with these things. Her mom became her guardian when they lived in another state and when the family moved to Virginia, the guardianship was transferred here. Nobody in her family knew that in Virginia, you lose your right to vote when a guardian is appointed because that is not true in the state where she moved from. Gladys was devastated when she found out. Her mom and sister tried to file a petition in court to get her voting rights restored, but they couldn't navigate the process alone. They reached out to dLCV and with the help of a dLCV attorney, Gladys got her voting rights restored last week!!

[Valerie Jones]: Okay. Once again, I would like to thank, Pam Cato, & Dr. Rick Mitchell, for providing this information

[Laura Sinclair]: There are so many resources navigating any big agency like that. And, I think that it can seem really intimidating especially if it's a new need but the folks at dvir just over and over we hear nothing but good things about what they do. And, I'm working with them, on the state Council. And, I can tell you, that, the behind-the-scenes they work really hard too, so, that centennial celebration they were talking about.... that runs for the year, the first event that they had they played **all sorts of old messages from the governor and** all . There's a public officials thanking them for their work. And even. a couple of really cool stories of people who went through Virginia DVBI, and, have gone on to start their own businesses to support the very same people that use those services. So- for sure, check out their website, check out those coming events- So that you can participate in some of the excitement, around what they do. And see how much we appreciate them.

[Valerie Jones]: Thank you all for listening to this episode of Rights Here, Rights Now, brought to you by the disability law center of Virginia. We're available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you get your podcasts. Don't forget to subscribe, and leave a review! J

if you need assistance or want more information about dLCV, and, what we do, visit us online at www.dlcv.org

[Valerie Jones]: Follow us on Twitter @disabilitylawva. And, share us with your friends.

Until next time- I'm Laura
Sinclair!

[Valerie Jones]: And I'm Valerie Jones. And this has
been: Rights Here

[Laura Sinclair]: Rights Now!

****END OF TRANSCRIPTIONS****

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Law Center of Virginia. We are available on Apple
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[Molly Carter]: **Feel free to visit us online at:** dlcv.org. ALSO,
follow us on Twitter, @disabilitylawVA. We also have a
Facebook that is the disability Law Center of Virginia.

[Ren Fazuski]: Share us with your friends; leave us a
comment; we love to chat.

[Molly Carter]: Until next time, I'm
Molly Carter.

[Ren Fazuski]: And I am Ren Fazuski. And this has
been: Rights Here!

[Molly Carter]: Rights Now!

****END OF TRANSCRIPTION!***