

Paths to Employment: Exploring Mentorship and Self-Employment Among People with Visual Impairments

Key Terms

1. **Mentoring** means getting support, advice, or guidance from someone more experienced.
2. **Self-employment** is when someone works for themselves instead of for a company or organization.
3. **Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)** counselors help people with disabilities find and keep jobs.

What Were We Trying to Learn?

The researchers aimed to understand how individuals with visual impairments who are not currently working or looking for work view mentoring and self-employment as possible ways to help them reenter the workforce. They investigated whether participants had access to mentors, the nature of those experiences, and whether self-employment had been considered or discussed with vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors. The objective was to gain deeper insights into the barriers and supports associated with these two strategies and how they might assist individuals with vision loss find meaningful employment opportunities.

Research Takeaway

Many individuals with visual impairments are interested in mentoring and self-employment, yet these strategies are seldom provided or supported by VR counselors. Helping people connect with mentors and explore self-employment could enhance their opportunities for returning to work.

How Was This Project Carried Out?

Researchers interviewed 30 adults with visual impairments who were not currently working about their thoughts and experiences related to mentoring and self-employment. Participants ranged in age from 28 to 64 years, with an average age of around 50. Nearly half of the participants were legally blind, possessing some or minimal functional vision, while others were totally blind or had low vision. The majority identified as white, female, and held a college degree. All participants were asked about their prior experiences with mentors and their views on starting their own businesses. Interviews were conducted by phone or through online meetings. The researchers analyzed the interviews to identify common themes and ideas.

What Are the Most Important Things We Learned?

1. Most people have never had the opportunity to work with a mentor or explore self-employment through their VR counselor.
2. Some individuals had helpful mentors, while others had mentors who did not understand

vision loss or failed to provide meaningful support.

3. Many people are interested in self-employment, particularly because it can help them avoid transportation issues and provide greater control over their schedules.
4. Barriers to self-employment included the fear of losing disability benefits, a lack of knowledge about how to start, and a lack of confidence in running a business.
5. People sought more information and support from VR counselors, including career suggestions aligned with their needs and help understanding benefits and job options.

How Do These Findings Relate to Me?

If you are a person with a visual impairment and are not currently working, you're not alone—and there may be more options available than you've been offered. Mentorship and self-employment could be valuable avenues to build confidence, explore career paths, and overcome barriers such as transportation or lack of accommodations. Even if these possibilities haven't been discussed by a VR counselor, it's worth inquiring about them or connecting with organizations that support people who are blind or have low vision such as the National Federation of the Blind, the American Council of the Blind, and the Hadley Institute for the Blind and Visually Impaired. With the proper support, these strategies could help you secure meaningful and flexible work that meets your needs.

Learn More

Findings were taken from the following article:

Crudden, A., Steverson, A., & Sergi, K. (2025). [Mentoring and self-employment: Potential strategies to promote labor force participation](#). *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 62(3), 234-243.

For more information about this project, visit the [project overview page](#).

Contact Us

Email: nrtc@colled.msstate.edu

Webpage: blind.msstate.edu or ntac.blind.msstate.edu

Facebook: www.facebook.com/theNRTC/

X/Twitter: @MSU_NRTC

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/nrtc-blindness-lowvision/>

Instagram: @nrtc_blv



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