



WELCOME TO THE STROUD VE SPOTLIGHT!

This month starts a new series spotlighting each VE across the Stroud family!

Rebecca Zugg, CRC, Vocational Expert

Rebecca is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor with a Master's degree (MRC) in Clinical Rehabilitation Counseling from the University of Kentucky. She signed a contract with Stroud Vocational Expert Services, LLC in January 2020. She has worked as a Screening Brief Intervention Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) Subject Matter Expert consultant on a national panel, Group Home Manager, and an Ohio Project Director developing programming impacting workforce development during the Opiate epidemic. She has done extensive interviewing of over 10,000 clients during her 20+ year career that spans federal, state, private, public, local systems working with persons with disabilities at the micro and macro levels. She has a specialized focus working extensively in mental health.



What made you want to become an SSA VE?

After leaving my job in Child Protection I had spent 10 years testifying in court as a witness for the state & missed being involved in a legal capacity. Once I gained additional experience working in world class psychiatric hospital settings, I completed my graduate degree with the goal of becoming a Vocational Expert for SSA. I had spent more than two decades interviewing people, reviewing case files, evaluating & assessing them while writing & documenting factually quite extensively. Preparing case work histories is something I like to do, and it is very nice to find myself back in the courtroom on a regular basis even if not "in person" anymore.

What is your Area of Specialization?

Mental health is certainly my area of specialization & evaluations. I think the field of mental health is often the last thought of when people talk about disabilities. Often with providers, family, and legal perspectives an opportunity is missed by not obtaining extremely high-quality assessments which are the absolute crux of everything. Who among us would ignore a roadmap to get to an unknown destination? My experience has taught me that many poor outcomes are secured simply by initially proceeding in the wrong direction. I find this concept to be true in all areas of life! For me, it is a nice blend of my background to accurately classify work, experience, abilities & limitations as future implications are being determined.

Did your sense of fulfillment transfer across from direct assistance to people with disabilities to the courtroom?

Many people have asked me that the past 5 years or so as I have been stepping away from direct service more and more. As someone who is a big picture thinker for me the answer is absolutely, yes. It provides a different sense of fulfillment that was always missing in direct service, because I was always looking ahead and at the implications, the impact, asking what is the result for this person?



How did the Stroud training program/VELaunchpad prepare you for your 1st testimony experience?

Thank goodness for their onboarding process. SSA testimony is even more tedious than what I was used to in juvenile, municipal, domestic court, etc. It really streamlined exactly where I needed to concentrate my efforts as I learned a new role, while highlighting the information and expectations. It was user-friendly and flexible, allowing me to go back and forth to information and to work at my own pace. As someone who has had well beyond 1,000 hours of non-academic training in my career, I found it engaging and well done.

How do you find the varied experiences as an impartial witness for the SSA?

I find it most challenging! Every Administrative Law Judge handles their courtroom differently, so I literally do not know what to expect any given day when I go to work.

What is the one thing you would want anyone entering this career field to know?

I think people need a broad range of life, education, work & personal experience to bring to the table. If you are someone with narrow work experiences or education this career will be even more overwhelming which is not something I want to imagine. Your toolbox needs to have a strong command of scope of practice, being able to think on your feet, and think in abstract terms or as I like to say, “outside the box.” Intense Children’s Protective Services field work, psychiatry, emergency department roles and project management really helped prepare me in this way. If you do not thrive in being placed in “under the gun” situations, this job is not for you.

CEO CORNER – MARILYN STROUD, MBA

Vocational Expert and Training Consultant

2020 has definitely been a challenge for all of us working within the SSA Vocational Expert world! I have found throughout my career that down times (as we are now experiencing) can become the “up” time of our lives. This is an opportune time to focus on the “things” that we all tend to put off. We can look to build a better life for ourselves and our loved ones and the world we live in. For instance, gardening used to be my passion, but “work” got in the way. My husband and I have enjoyed building a picturesque garden giving us time together. Working in the garden and yard is a form of mental and physical release making us get off the sofa and get some exercise, help our grocery bill, and have some really great fresh vegetables and have some mental reflection as to what is really important in life.



As I have encouraged each of our new Vocational Experts who have or are completing their training and beginning to testify, this is also a great time to invest into further advancing careers by learning a new skill and knowledge base. Each Stroud VE not only holds a high level of credentials and extensive direct experience working with disabilities, but all are completing or have completed the Stroud Academy VELAUNCHPAD© earning continuing education credits toward their CRC and/or ABVE certifications.

Over the next 12 months, you will be meeting each our new VEs and getting to know them better. Each will be providing our readers with “expert knowledge” from the specialized field of Vocational Forensics and Vocational Rehabilitation. Enjoy and let’s continue learning together!