


VocRehab Perspective

 Newsletter of the West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services

DRS grows client services with grants

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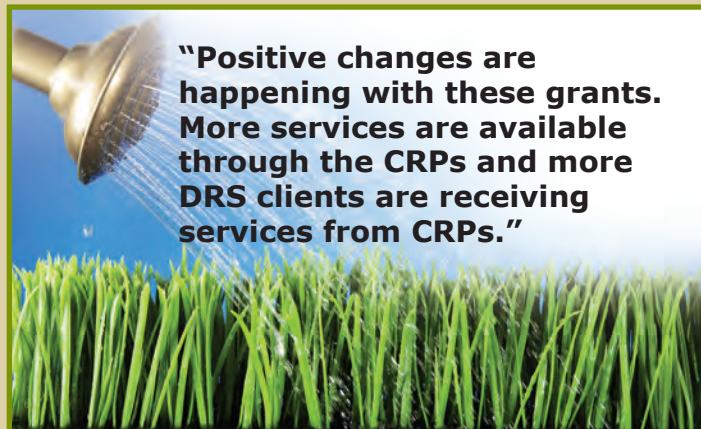
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"Positive changes are happening with these grants. More services are available through the CRPs and more DRS clients are receiving services from CRPs."

In fiscal year 2009, DRS began a significant initiative to grow services that assist individuals with disabilities in preparing for employment and obtaining jobs throughout West Virginia. These expansion opportunities have been offered to Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) through grants awarded using a competitive request for proposals process. DRS encouraged proposals targeting areas of the state where services have been limited or unavailable.

A CRP provides vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities to enable those individuals to maximize their opportunities for employment. DRS purchases services for its clients from CRPs. Specific services being expanded include job coaching, job development, work adjustment training, life skills development and work experience.

This initiative began with the assistance of the West Virginia Legislature through a supplemental appropriation during the 2008 Legislative Session. Since then, DRS has continued this initiative using federal funds for the vocational rehabilitation program, as well as American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds. DRS has invested approximately \$4.3 million in this initiative, awarding 56 grants to CRPs to provide services throughout the state.

"Positive changes are happening with these grants. More services are available through the CRPs and more DRS clients are receiving services from CRPs," said LuAnn Summers, rehabilitation program manager. "We also know that on average, DRS is spending more on consumers with significant disabilities for community-based services than in past years."



Message From The Director

Deborah Lovely, Director
West Virginia Division
of Rehabilitation Services

In mathematics, the shortest distance between two points is a straight line. But, life does not always afford us the luxury of a straight line to get from one point to another. As with the roads throughout our beautiful state, life can be filled with turns and sharp curves that sometimes cannot be anticipated.

At DRS, we provide assistance to people with disabilities who want to be gainfully employed.

Vocational rehabilitation services can help those individuals navigate the sharp curves that life has thrown onto their path to employment.

"...we will persist in our progress and our commitment to serving people with disabilities."

As individuals, we are each unique, with our own strengths, talents and abilities. DRS counselors work individually with each client to identify their strengths and abilities, as well as any obstacles that may stand in the way of employment. The client and counselor work together to set an employment goal and to define the services that each client will need to meet his or her goal.

There are times during the vocational rehabilitation process that a change in circumstance or one of those unanticipated curves requires a plan to be amended. Additional services may be needed so that the client can meet his or her defined employment goal.

It is said that our only security is our ability to change. This same philosophy applies to the Division of Rehabilitation Services' administration.

DRS strategically establishes goals using input from Consumer Satisfaction Surveys and the Comprehensive Needs Assessment and with assistance from our State Rehabilitation Council, the Statewide Independent Living Council and the Client Assistance Program.

Through the implementation of carefully planned strategies, DRS perseveres in improving and expanding vocational rehabilitation services that are benefiting more West Virginians with disabilities. Since 2007, DRS has experienced steady increases in the number of individuals applying for and receiving services. DRS has also increased the amount of funding being spent on client services, as well as invested substantially in expanding the availability of vocational rehabilitation services in local communities throughout West Virginia.

DRS achieved these goals through hard work, diligence and being open to change. Navigating life's turns and sharp curves as necessary, we will persist in our progress and our commitment to serving people with disabilities.



DRS sponsored a conference in March 2010 to facilitate development of a cooperative plan for improving services to transition students being served by DRS and Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs), as recommended by DRS' CRP Advisory Council. George Washington University, DRS' Technical Assistance and Continuing Education Center, assisted with speakers and facilitation of the conference.

The conference brought together most of the DRS school rehabilitation counselors, Department of Education transition personnel and CRP staff from across the state. The goal was to improve working relationships and communication between these groups and to develop district action plans for ongoing communication and partnerships to continue beyond the conference and to address specific district needs.

"For more than 20 years, there has been a strong emphasis on transition services for students with disabilities because of high dropout and unemployment rates," said Susan Weinberger, education and employment programs supervisor for DRS. "Both the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Rehabilitation Act emphasize the importance of transition services, requiring outcome-based approaches to providing services.

While IDEA focuses on outcomes including post-secondary education and training, employment and community living, the Rehabilitation Act stresses career development and competitive employment in an integrated work setting."

CRPs want to be active partners in transition planning and service delivery. DRS purchases valuable services for its clients from CRPs, including job coaching, supported employment, community-based assessment, direct placement, work adjustment, life skills training, extended assessment and extended supported employment services.

During the conference, employees from each of DRS' six districts worked with CRPs and school personnel within those districts to develop an action plan that includes potential partners, a vision statement and communication tools. The action plan also identifies who will continue facilitating its development and implementation.

"Ultimately, our goal is to build these collaborative partnerships to encourage and promote efficient resource utilization and shared service delivery to eliminate service gaps for West Virginia's transitioning youth with disabilities," said DRS Director Deborah Lovely.

Transition services help students with disabilities develop and pursue their future work goals.

Possible services include:

- Medical and psychological assessment
- Vocational evaluation and planning
- Career counseling and guidance
- Training and education after high school
- Job-site assessment and accommodations
- Job placement
- Job coaching
- On-the-job training
- Supported employment
- Assistive technology and devices
- Time-limited medical or psychological treatment

Outstanding employers receive awards

The Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) is pleased to recognize several outstanding employers for being essential partners and assisting the division in its mission by employing DRS clients. Through its newly developed Employer Awards Program, DRS counselors and employment specialists nominated and selected employers who have demonstrated leadership and success in fostering relationships with DRS and in hiring individuals with disabilities.

“All of the employers selected recognize the abilities and the positive contributions individuals with disabilities bring to the workplace,” said DRS Director Deborah Lovely. “Many of the employers demonstrated extraordinary consideration to accommodate the special needs of one employee, while other employers consistently provide employment opportunities to DRS clients.”

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DRS offers individualized service to assist employers in retaining valued employees or in hiring qualified employees. DRS can provide consultation related to disability, as well as information about assistive technology, potential tax credits, workplace accommodations and other benefits to employers.

Through these essential partnerships, employers not only hire qualified DRS clients, but also provide valuable on-the-job training and other work-related opportunities that are essential to the success of many DRS clients.

One employer in each district was selected to receive the Employer of the Year Award, while others received certificates recognizing them as distinguished employers. Events were held in each of DRS' six districts to honor those employers nominated and selected.

DRS proudly honors:

District 1

R. P. R. Industries, Grantsville

-- Employer of the Year

Bob Evans Restaurants, all Charleston locations
Park Avenue Restaurant and Motel, Inc., Danville
WV Division of Tax and Revenue, Charleston
Mayberry's Restaurant, St. Albans
Kroger Company, all Charleston locations

District 2

The Op Shop, Fairmont -- Employer of the Year

Seneca Designs, Elkins
Elkins Truck Service, Elkins
Elks #482, Clarksburg
Kroger Company, Elkins
Aegis Communications Group, Elkins

District 3

Fleet Towing and Repair, Wheeling

-- Employer of the Year

Dollar General Market, Store No. 12011, Wellsburg
Amerilube, Weirton
Allan's Foreign Car Service, Parkersburg
Taco Bell, Vienna
Felman Production Inc., Letart

District 4

Sweet Springs Valley Water Company, Gap Mills -- Employer of the Year

NPW Development Corporation, Beckley
Princeton Public Library, Princeton
WR Murdock and Sons, Inc., Fayetteville
Food Lion, LLC, White Sulphur Springs
Pocahontas Center, Marlinton

District 5

WorkForce West Virginia, Huntington -- Employer of the Year

Perennial Favorites Greenhouse, Huntington
Wyoming County Board of Education, Pineville
Mountain State Tax, Tire and Auto, Harts
Boone Nursing and Rehabilitation Services, Danville
Wendy's, Adams Avenue location, Huntington

District 6

Food Lion Store 2568, Martinsburg -- Employer of the Year

Petersburg Foodland, Petersburg
Cumberland Times News, Cumberland, MD
In Touch Communications, LLC, Martinsburg

Partnership benefits veterans with disabilities

To better serve veterans, the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have entered into a partnership to provide more effective vocational rehabilitation services to veterans with disabilities. The VA's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program assists veterans with service-connected disabilities to prepare for, find and keep suitable jobs. While the VA works solely with veterans, DRS works broadly with individuals whose disability is interfering with their ability to get or keep a job.

A memorandum of agreement outlining the partnership was signed and became effective April 1, 2010. This agreement allows DRS and the VA to work as a team on job development and placement for eligible veterans. The partnership will begin as a pilot program in DRS' Huntington District, which consists of Cabell, Wayne, Lincoln, Mingo, Logan, Wyoming and McDowell counties.

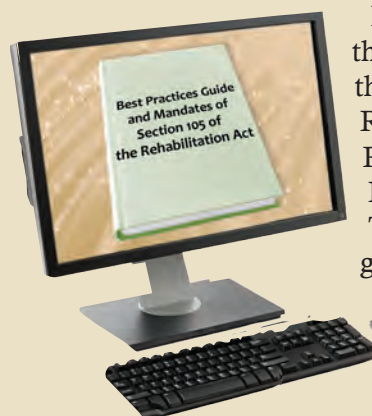
With the increased number of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan with disabilities, an increased need exists for services such as vocational counseling, supported employment, vocational and technical training, post-secondary education, assistive technology, job readiness training, vocational evaluation, job placement and other services. DRS counselors, in particular, will assist with case management, monitoring and follow-up.

According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate for veterans who served in the military since September 2001 was 10.2 percent in 2009. About 21 percent of those veterans reported having a service-connected disability in August 2009.

Through this pilot program, the VA began referring veterans with disabilities from Cabell, Wayne and Lincoln counties to DRS for employment-related services on June 1. DRS and the VA believe that quality employment outcomes for veterans with disabilities will be substantially improved through this collaborative working relationship.

Lovely appointed to RSA study group

West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services Director Deborah Lovely has been appointed to serve as a member and chair of the 36th Institute on Rehabilitation Issues (IRI). The IRI is a national forum for discussing important challenges facing the federal-state vocational rehabilitation programs. The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) annually funds two studies, one at the University of Arkansas and one at The George Washington University. University representatives serve as coordinators for the two study groups.



Director Lovely chairs the team that will study the topic of Vocational Rehabilitation -- State Rehabilitation Council Partnership: Working Together Works. The group will focus on the relationship between vocational rehabilitation and State Rehabilitation Councils (SRCs). Its charge is

to develop a publication that provides an overview and explanation of the mandates contained in Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act, and to outline a best practices guide for consumers, vocational rehabilitation administrators and staff, SRC members and partners, as well as elected officials.

"I am honored for the opportunity to work collaboratively with other professionals on this topic," said Director Lovely. "The division has a very strong relationship with our SRC. That experience will be beneficial to this effort."

Each year, two topics are selected for study. Study group members are nominated and selected by RSA to serve throughout the year. The IRI applies existing research to contemporary issues and challenges in the vocational rehabilitation field to develop a training document that is disseminated nationally to vocational rehabilitation counselors, consumers, advocates, administrators, educators, researchers and trainers.

Outreach efforts target minority populations

DRS outreach initiatives continue to be successful. In 2009, DRS began

a statewide campaign to reach West Virginians with disabilities. Ongoing efforts to increase public awareness of DRS and its services have also included outreach activities targeting minority populations in the state. As a result of statewide outreach efforts, DRS has seen an increase of approximately 1,000 new applicants in each of the last two fiscal years. Additionally, in FY 2009, the number of minority applicants for DRS services increased by 22.9 percent over FY 2008.

DRS is subject to a federal performance indicator to assure that minorities with disabilities receive equal access to vocational rehabilitation services. The performance indicator specifically reviews the service rate ratio of minorities with disabilities to non-minorities with disabilities. DRS continues to exceed this federal indicator.

DRS identified three counties where services to minorities with disabilities appear to be disproportionate to services being provided to non-minority populations. These counties have higher populations of African American citizens, the largest minority group in West Virginia, and include Kanawha, Raleigh and McDowell counties. DRS has intensified outreach efforts in these counties to ultimately increase the number of minorities receiving vocational rehabilitation services.

DRS continues to identify specific partners and places that offer opportunities to share information about DRS with minorities with disabilities. Efforts



include disseminating information in libraries, churches and doctors' offices, as well as newspaper advertisements. Successful outreach activities are being replicated in other counties.

In Kanawha County, DRS maintains contact with the Charleston Black Ministerial

Alliance to encourage referrals and disseminate information about services. DRS also works with West Virginia State University to publicize information to its student population. In Charleston, DRS placed a vocational rehabilitation counselor on the city's East End, as well as at an itinerant site on the West Side.

During the last two years, DRS led a collaborative effort to disseminate information about disability rights, vocational rehabilitation and independent living during MultiFest in Charleston. Participants included

representatives from West Virginia University's Center for Excellence in Disabilities, West Virginia Centers for Independent Living, the

Statewide Independent Living Council, the State Rehabilitation Council, the ADA Coalition and the Fair Shake Network.

In FY 2009, the five counties with the largest numbers of new applicants from minority backgrounds include Kanawha (74), Cabell (48), Raleigh (36), Mercer (33) and Berkeley (31).

DRS will continue outreach and awareness efforts throughout West Virginia that result in identifying and serving new consumers with disabilities.

...in FY 2009, the number of minority applicants for DRS services increased by 22.9 percent over FY 2008.

Low Vision Driving Program Success



Program driving students improve their skills on a challenging 40-mile route in and around Kanawha County.

Since July 2009, the DRS intensive driver program has taught 10 West Virginians to drive safely with compensating bioptic lens systems. A new law established procedures for drivers whose vision falls below the normal legal limits to qualify for a Class G driver's license. Applicants by law may be subject to daytime driving restrictions and other individual restrictions necessary for safe driving.

To date, the West Virginia Bioptic Driving Program is so successful, and demand for these services already has become so steady, that all six training classes between now and April 2011 are filled. More applicants await screening.

The entire program now is a two-person show. Chuck Huss, a driver rehabilitation specialist, and Rhonda Buck, a state certified driving instructor, train these drivers in the classroom and on the road. After proving their abilities in an intensive six-week course, graduates of the program are eligible for on-the-road license testing at the Department of Motor Vehicles driver testing center in Winfield.

"If they can do what we put them through here," Buck said, "we're confident they can drive almost anywhere."

Bioptic lens systems take the concept of bifocals to a whole new level. The wearer, using small telescopic lenses attached permanently to the upper part of



Driving students in the program learn to use a bioptic lens system, which is comprised of a telescopic lens permanently attached to the prescription glasses, called a carrier lens.

corrective glasses, can quickly shift focus to the telescopic lens to decipher distant details, and then return just as quickly to scanning the road using their less distinct peripheral vision aided by the prescription "carrier lens."

Huss makes a compelling case for drivers with mild to moderate central vision loss whose peripheral vision is intact or unaffected.

"Driving is primarily a peripheral vision task," Huss explained.

Even drivers with so called "perfect" central vision of 20/20 will rely nearly 90 percent of the time on the less detailed data they gather through peripheral vision. For this reason, Huss suggests there is little functional difference between a driver with 20/40 central visual acuity and a

similarly trained bioptic-equipped driver with 20/200 visual acuity.

"Inattention and distraction are by far the biggest cause of accidents," emphasized Buck, who has logged more than 15,000 instructional miles since July 2009.

In time, Huss expects the program to serve the needs of many drivers whose vision loss places them outside the legal limit for a standard West Virginia driver's license.

"If they can do what we put them through here," Buck said, "we're confident they can drive almost anywhere."

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