Building a *Commonwealth of Opportunity* for Virginians with Disabilities

DRS
VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

Virginia State Rehabilitation Council
2010 Annual Report

"Where opportunity is absent, we must create it.

Where opportunity is limited, we must expand it.

Where opportunity is unequal, we must make it open to everyone."

- Governor Bob McDonnell, Inaugural Speech, January 16, 2010

"In keeping with Governor McDonnell's goal of building a 'commonwealth of opportunity,' we have placed an enormous focus on economic development and job creation in Virginia. We recognize that the dignity in work and the ability to be self-sufficient are integral parts of who we are and how we contribute to society. The Department of Rehabilitative Services plays a vital role in ensuring that Virginians with disabilities have every opportunity to fully participate in our communities and lead productive, meaningful lives."

- Dr. Bill Hazel, Secretary of Health and Human Resources

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Commissioner

James A. Rothrock

Our Mission

The mission of the Virginia State Rehabilitation Council, in partnership with the Department of Rehabilitative Services, and in collaboration with advocacy groups, consumers and their families, is to ensure that Virginians with disabilities receive quality services while seeking to achieve meaningful employment, self-sufficiency and independence.

Our Vision

All Virginians with disabilities will have access to quality services leading to meaningful employment, self-sufficiency and independence.

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Message from SRC Chair Florence Watt

On behalf of the Virginia State Rehabilitation Council, I am pleased to share the 2010 annual report. At a time when our nation's economy forces budget constraints on human service programs, Virginia's vocational rehabilitation program remains innovative and effective in providing quality services to persons with disabilities. The services provided by DRS have assisted many Virginians with disabilities to become productive and independent. This report focuses on the successful vocational outcomes resulting from these services.

The annual report's theme is "Building a Commonwealth of Opportunity for Virginians with Disabilities." In Governor Bob McDonnell's inaugural address, he stated: "Where opportunity is absent, we must create it. Where opportunity is limited, we must expand it. Where opportunity is unequal, we must make it open to everyone." How true and profound this is, for people with disabilities lack many opportunities that others take for granted. These opportunities include the means to become employed and achieve financial independence. The mission of DRS, in collaboration with the Virginia State Rehabilitation Council, is to create these very opportunities.

The Virginia State Rehabilitation Council is comprised of individuals from diverse backgrounds who have exceptional expertise pertaining to persons with disabilities. Some members have first-hand experience with the limited and unequal opportunities that exist for persons with disabilities. The Council's goal is to work tirelessly to advocate and enhance services that will assist persons with disabilities to become employed. The strong, collaborative relationship between the SRC and DRS enables both to accomplish our mutual goal of creating opportunities for Virginians with disabilities.

- Florence Watt

Message from DRS Commissioner Jim Rothrock

Last year, my message for the annual report noted the negative effect of the poor economy on our Vocational Rehabilitation program. This year, the economy remained difficult for many, but I see promising trends for a better 2011 for Virginians with disabilities.

In October, Secretary Hazel joined me in honoring a number of "Disability Employment Champions" who distinguished themselves by their efforts to hire qualified DRS clients within their organizations. Here are some of the more recognizable honorees:

- Bon Secours Richmond Health System and VCU Health System, for their exceptional work with Project SEARCH in the Richmond area;
- Wells Fargo-Wachovia, for its partnerships in Southwest Virginia;
- The Melting Pot, a national restaurant chain and significant partner in Charlottesville; and
- Nick Ibarra, owner of Cortes de Nico Salon/Barbershop in Waynesboro, who demonstrated the ease with which small business owners can become Champions.

DRS enjoyed several successes this fiscal year in creating opportunities for our clients:

- The program served the most clients in its history, assisting 32,143 clients on caseloads.
- DRS successfully closed the cases of 3,390 clients. While this was less than our goal of 4,000 successful closures, the figure represents a 5.4% increase from the previous year.
- The agency's Southwest region exceeded its goal of successful closures with 656 people going to work as a result of our services.
- More than 8,800 Individualized Plans for Employment (IPEs) were developed for Virginians with disabilities, an increase of 44% over 2009 and 22% above our goal for 2010. Every region exceeded its goal for IPE development.

Our Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center also continued to flourish. For the first time, the Center sustained a daily census of more than 300 people at its facility in Fishersville. More students used the Center's relatively new "LifeSkills" effort and gained increased confidence, independence and employment skills. Considering the troubled economy—which studies show have a greater impact on Virginians with disabilities—DRS programs remain on track, with great hope emerging for employment growth for our clients and all Virginians in the coming year. We will certainly see our agency become an even greater asset in our ***Commonwealth of Opportunity***.

- Jim Rothrock

2010 SRC Members

Karen Baugh
Ex-officio, Waldorf, MD

Charles Benagh
Alexandria

Gregory Coleman
Chesapeake

Stephanie Colorado
Midlothian

Sandra Cook
Petersburg

Matthew Deans
Richmond

Daniel DeBoer
Richmond

Charles Downs
Vice Chair, Waynesboro

Donna Kay Graff
Shenandoah

Karen Gregory-Williams
Glen Allen

Sarah Liddle
Shawsville

Anthony Lineberry
Manakin Sabot

Kathleen Maybee
Richmond

Shannon McManus Jones
Richmond

Marianne Moore
Richmond

James Rothrock
Ex-officio, Richmond

Cherie Takemoto
Arlington

Florence Watt
Chair, Ashland

Celia Yette
Petersburg

SRC Responsibilities

The Virginia State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) was established in 1992 to provide advice to and work in partnership with DRS to enhance services to the agency's many programs including Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). The SRC's federal and state mandated responsibilities include:

- Ensuring the effective delivery of services to eligible Virginians with disabilities, and reviewing and analyzing the performance of the VR program.
- Working in partnership with DRS to set goals and priorities, report on program effectiveness, provide advice on policies, measure consumer satisfaction and assess the needs of Virginians with disabilities.
- Providing an annual report to the Governor and the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration on the status of the VR program.
- Publicizing DRS policies and programs; advising public officials on the delivery of public services and the protection of the rights of persons with disabilities; advising on fiscal policies, grants, contracts, regulations, budgets and requests for appropriations.

SRC Membership

SRC members are appointed by the Governor. The membership reflects a representation of individuals with disabilities and disability advocacy groups, current and former consumers of vocational rehabilitation, people in business and industry, education and Employment Services Organizations. Members serve on the Virginia Workforce Council, the Statewide Independent Living Council and the Virginia Assistive Technology System Advisory Council.

Front Row:
Florence Watt (SRC Chair)
Matthew Deans
Celia Yette
Sandra Cook
Anthony Lineberry
Charles Downs (Vice Chair)

Second Row:
Kathy Maybee
Karen Gregory-Williams
Cherie Takemoto
Donna Kay Graff
James Rothrock
Danny DeBoer
Karen Baugh

SRC Activities

SRC Awards and Recognition

The SRC presented its third annual Roy J. Ward SRC Employee Leadership Award to five exceptional vocational rehabilitation employees, recognizing them for their job performance and their contributions to the rehabilitation community. The award recipients are featured on page 15.

Cherie Takemoto, Sarah Liddle, Karen Baugh and Marianne Moore received the 2010 SRC Chairperson's Award for their outstanding service to the Council. All recipients of this award serve on the Internal Affairs Committee of the SRC. Ms. Takemoto is a former chairperson of the SRC and a representative from the Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center (PEATC). Ms. Liddle is a representative of the State Independent Living Council (SILC). Ms. Baugh is a DRS vocational rehabilitation counselor and is the chairperson of the Internal Affairs Committee. Marianne Moore represents the Department of Education.

Council members helped commemorate October as National Disability Employment Awareness Month by attending the Fifth Annual Disability Employment Champions Awards Luncheon, co-hosted by DRS and Dominion to recognize businesses in Virginia for their employment of individuals with disabilities.

2010 SRC Chairperson's Award Recipients Karen Baugh , Cherie Takemoto, and Sarah Liddle with Florence Watt, SRC Chair

State Plan

The State Plan Subcommittee reviewed and approved the drafts of two 2011 State Plan Attachments. The Goals and Priorities Attachment was also approved. Based on the recommendations of the Service Providers Subcommittee, the development of a "report card" for Employment Service Organizations has been incorporated into the 2011 State Plan. The "report card" will be developed jointly with representatives from the Employment Services Organizations and DRS staff.

Collaboration

The SRC maintained its liaison relationship with the State Rehabilitation Council for the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired. Under this relationship, each Council appoints a member to attend other Council's meetings and reports back on the activities and actions of each Council. At each meeting, Council members presented a report on the activities of other organizations that impact Virginians with disabilities. These included the Virginia Workforce Council, Department of Education, Statewide Independent Living Council, Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center, Assistive Technology Advisory Council and the Mental Health Planning Council.

Council Development

The SRC held a planning retreat where Drs. Robert Froehlich and Maureen McGuire-Kuletz of the George Washington University Technical Assistance and Continuing Education Center (TACE) facilitated the Council members in actions to address their role in accomplishing the stated Mission and Vision Statements.

Advocacy

SRC members sent electronic copies of the 2009 SRC Annual Report to their individual Representatives and Senators within the General Assembly. Florence Watt, SRC chair, emailed the report along with her personal VR story to all members of the General Assembly.

SRC member Danny DeBoer initiated communication with Richmond's ABC affiliate, WRIC, to produce a segment highlighting disability employment in observance of October Disability Employment Awareness Month. The segment featured Handcraft Cleaners, one of the 2010 Champions Award recipients, as a disability-friendly business. HandCraft owner Jay Nichols spoke about his company's efforts to recruit workers with disabilities. Commissioner Rothrock was interviewed for comment on Disability Employment Awareness Month and the Champions Awards. The segment aired October 4, three days before the awards ceremony. View the segment by visiting our YouTube VADRS page and selecting the "WRIC.Com Monday's Medical" clip.

SRC Website

Danny DeBoer, chairperson for the External Affairs Committee of the SRC, redesigned the SRC website (www.va-src.org) to serve as a helpful resource for individuals researching the vocational rehabilitation program. When visiting the website, users have access to copies of previous SRC Annual Reports, SRC meeting information and links to other Internet sites that may be of interest to Virginians with disabilities.

Other Duties and Activities

- The SRC approved new contracts for two hearing officers for the VR consumer appeals process: Barbara Byers, CRC, and Lt. Col. Regina Kane, Esq.
- Sandra Cook, SRC member, attended the annual conference of the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation in Bethesda, Md.
- Council members attended the 2010 Transition Forum in Roanoke to learn and interact with students with disabilities, parents and professionals involved in services that help transition-age youth move from high school to gainful employment.
- The SRC reviewed and approved FFY 2009 Consumer Satisfaction Report.

SRC Recommendations

The SRC recommends the following actions for DRS to implement in 2011:

Develop a plan to ensure that the VR consumer satisfaction survey results are utilized by Field Rehabilitative Services staff for continuous improvement.

Develop a "Report Card" to provide VR counselors with information on individual Employment Services Organizations (ESO) services to VR consumers. The SRC is willing to participate in the development of this Report Card.

Continue efforts to support disability-owned businesses through the self-employment enterprise initiative.

Continue to expand efforts with the Employment Networks and other work incentive initiatives available through the Social Security Administration. Offer opportunities for DRS and ESOs to help people with disabilities become gainfully employed and recoup the costs through other funds.

Support more visible coordination between the vocational rehabilitation and independent living programs in providing services for Virginians with disabilities.

Continue to work to expand outreach to, and meet the needs of, people with disabilities who have limited English proficiency (LEP) by addressing recruitment, training, and interpreter/translation services to ensure ability to access VR services. Disseminate information about DRS services to non-traditional sources such as churches to reach individuals from different ethnic backgrounds.

Develop a videotape (closed captioned and with a sign language interpreter on the screen) for clients and their parents on DRS services.

Proceed with plan to improve transition services by collaborating with other agencies serving youth who are hard to serve (high school dropouts, those in foster care and those with limited English proficiency).

Continue to provide a broader dissemination of information regarding the role and initiatives of the SRC and the benefits of the VR program to stakeholders and policy makers, including enhancements to the SRC's website to make it a more useful site for the public.

Continue to apprise SRC regarding DRS' need to remain in Order of Selection as we look towards FFY 2012.

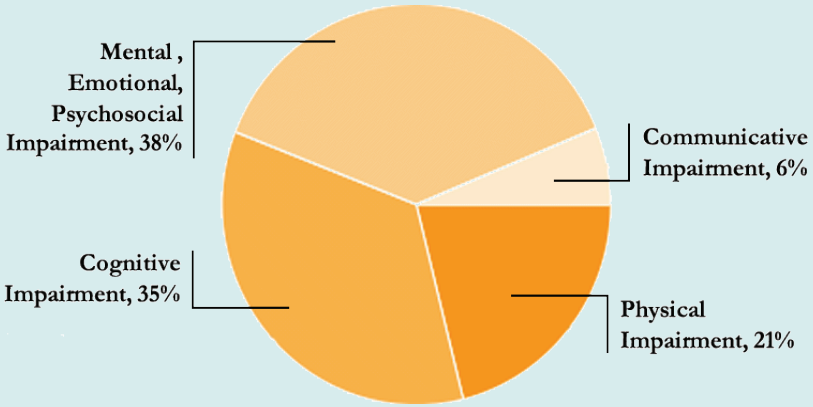
Investigate and publish the return on investment for Virginians with disabilities who become employed after receiving VR services. Policy maker and stakeholder support for the VR program might be strengthened if DRS could illustrate the return on investment of the program in assisting people with disabilities in becoming employed.

Develop clear, simple and consistently communicated public education and information about the VR program. The general public and those who come to DRS for services seem to lack a clear understanding of the VR program, including the eligibility requirements and services. While applicable to all age groups, this seems to be particularly true for transition-age youth, their parents and school personnel. Eligibility rules, including the intricacies of functional limitations and the availability of services, are difficult to understand and not always consistently communicated.

Continue the collaborative efforts by SRC and DRS to examine ways of increasing public and consumer input regarding VR services, including looking at opportunities to coordinate with other agencies and organizations to receive public comment.

Develop online training for SRC members and provide a session on transition services for the SRC New Member Orientation Program.

Primary Impairments of Consumers Served FFY10



Expenditure Categories FFY10

Supported Employment Services	$10,029,723.43	55.4%
Training including Tuition	$2,607,790.37	14.4%
Medical and Therapeutic	$1,176,492.26	6.5%
Fuel, Travel and Transportation	$722,612.87	4.0%
Maintenance - Room and Board	$671 ,835.02	3.7%
Durable Medical Equipment	$645,564.01	3.6%
Non-medical Supplies and Services	$635,474.45	3.5%
Attendant Care and PAS Payment	$517,210.17	2.9%
Modifications - home, vehicle and rehabilitation engineering	$354,261.52	2.0%
Diagnostics	$208,480.38	1.2%
Independent Living Services	$204,606.79	1.1%
Interpretive Services	$195,411.79	1.1%
Service to family members	$77,031.70	0.4%
Self Employment	$40,557.69	0.2%
Work Incentive Services	$9,550.00	0.1%
Total	**$18,096,602.45**	**100. 0%**

Vocational Rehabilitation Program

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services are provided to assist Virginians with disabilities to reach their desired employment goal. Eligible individuals with disabilities work in partnership with his/her VR counselor and other DRS staff and service providers. Services may include assessment, vocational evaluation, counseling and guidance, restoration, training, job development, assistive technology and supported employment. Mutually determined services and service providers are developed into an Individualized Plan for Employment to achieve a vocational goal and meaningful employment in accordance with the personal needs and objectives of each individual.

2010 Program Highlights:

VR Outcomes

Although DRS was under an Order of Selection for most of Federal Fiscal Year 2009, the Federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act allowed all categories to become open in November FFY2010. An Order of Selection is implemented when sufficient funds are not available to serve all eligible individuals. Under an Order of Selection, eligible individuals are placed on a waiting list for VR services according to disability categories. The opening of all categories is one factor that led to DRS serving the largest number of consumers in its history. A total of 32,143 consumers were on the rolls in FFY2010, an 11% increase from the previous fiscal year.

Other program highlights include:

- 8,898 Individualized Plans for Employment were written;
- A total of 3,390 consumers, a 5.4% increase from the previous fiscal year, became employed after receiving vocational rehabilitation services;
- 93% of these consumers were employed in a competitive job;
- 79.5% of those employed were most significantly disabled;
- The average hourly earnings was $9.47.

Transition Services

DRS continues to serve a large number of students (age 14 to 22) seeking VR services to enable them to transition from secondary school to work. In 2010, 42.5% of VR consumers who received services were students in transition. In addition, 29.4% of all VR consumers who achieved an employment outcome were transition students. Based on U.S. Census population projections, the civilian non-institutionalized population (age 5 to 20) is expected to increase by 9.4% between 2005 and 2015. In this period, approximately 8.1% of 5 to 20-year-olds will be students with disabilities. Therefore, the number of students needing transition services will continue to increase, requiring more dedicated resources to this population.

The 25th Annual Virginia Transition Forum, entitled "The State of Transition," was held in Roanoke. The forum was attended by over 1,000 participants, including DRS counselors, school personnel, consumers, family members and community partners. During the forum, a Youth Summit was held to allow those in transition to voice recommendations regarding transition services. The second annual Parent Summit, which allows for parental involvements in the transition planning process, also took place in coordination with the forum.

Successful Collaborations

DRS continued to collaborate with the Department of Social Services (DSS) to provide VR services to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) recipients. Grant funding from DSS provides financial support for the purchase of case services and salaries for a TANF Coordinator and three VR counselors. In 2010, 1,295 TANF clients were served and 154 of them reached a successful employment outcome.

Since 1988, the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) and DRS have had an interagency agreement under which DRS provides VR services primarily to mutual clients of both agencies who have substance abuse disabilities and meet the DRS eligibility criteria. Located throughout the Commonwealth, 24 counselors, supported by DBHDS funding, work in partnership with 19 Community Services Boards to serve this population. In 2010, 2,638 consumers were served by substance abuse counselors and 395 became employed.

VR Consumer Satisfaction

DRS' consumer satisfaction survey process captures data for vocational rehabilitation consumers who were either vocationally rehabilitated or received other services in FFY 2009. The survey provides a systematic method of hearing the point of view of the consumers. Participants in the survey are able to provide their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with services, staff and various aspects of the VR process. In general, satisfaction ratings on most measures suggest a strong VR experience for DRS consumers who participated in the survey in FFY 2009.

- Overall satisfaction was 81%, just one percentage point below the DRS performance target of 82%. The six-year average for overall satisfaction is 81%.
- Of the consumers whose cases were closed with competitive employment, 81% expressed satisfaction with their jobs.
- DRS consumers remain fairly consistent in their perception of their relationship with their VR counselor. More than 85% felt their counselors did not rush them, took their case seriously and clearly explained services available to them. Satisfaction with counselors meeting discussed timetables was 82% and satisfaction with knowledge of available programs in the community was 78%.
- Satisfaction with the consumer's involvement in developing the Employment Plan was 75% and satisfaction with the time it took to develop the Employment Plan was 74%.
- DRS continued to receive high ratings from consumers regarding their perception of how they were treated by staff (90%), willingness to refer a friend to DRS (84%) and willingness to come back to DRS (83%).
- Satisfaction with receiving the information they needed was 81%. This rating was slightly higher than the consumers' perception of receiving the services they needed (79%) and benefiting from the services they received (77%).

Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center: 2010 Highlights

What makes WWRC a comprehensive rehabilitation center is the mix of the services and programs it offers to people with disabilities. It is through the unique combination of vocational, medical, psychological, residential, recreational programs and services, and the interaction between the staff and the consumer that makes WWRC comprehensive. For 60 years, WWRC has made a difference in people's lives, dating back to 1947 when the first clients were admitted. Since that time, the Center has served more than 70,000 clients. The Center's focus on Field Rehabilitation Services as a primary customer resulted in an extraordinary collaboration among WWRC and the VR counselors in the field. The product is customized services that are creative, individualized and designed specifically to reach our clients' employment goals. Visit wwrc.virginia.gov to learn more about the Center and the services it provides.

2010 State Fiscal Year Data for WWRC

Summary by Service Area

Health Services/Medical	1748
Vocational Evaluation	566
PERT	488
Vocational Training	599
Life Skills Transition Program	346

Employment Outcome Highlights

Vocational Training	63.6%
Life Skills Transition Program	58.5%
PERT	53.1%
Vocational Training/PERT	71.7%
Life Skills/Vocational Training/PERT	76.5%
Life Skills/Vocational Training	65.6%

WWRC highlights:

- WWRC served 3,074 individuals, a 14% increase over the previous year.
- The average daily census of 329 was a 12% increase over the previous year.
- Three clinics were scheduled to bring WWRC assistive technology (AT) evaluation services to the Abingdon Rehabilitation Engineering Shop for clients in Southwest Virginia. Thirteen clients received evaluations and guidance for procuring any recommended assistive technology.
- WWRC staff conducted an in-depth study for integrating AT within WWRC's Vocational Services. The study documented current AT practices in Vocational Evaluation, level and type of AT utilization, challenges/barriers/opportunities for AT integration and specific recommendations.
- The expansion of WWRC's Life Skills Transition Program (LSTP) resulted in a 40% increase in the number of clients served. As part of the expansion, WWRC has developed a program evaluation plan to monitor and track the vocational training and employment outcomes of LSTP clients.
- WWRC increased the number of transition services provided to clients during the past year. The PERT program served a total of 591 clients through initial evaluations, situational assessments and Transition Academies. WWRC also served six clients via a mobile assessment and hosted a career day for 35 students.
- WWRC established a Career Readiness Certificate Lab and implemented a WorkKeys test administration site using Aztec software. All WWRC Training and LSTP students have access to the Aztec Ready for Work and Occupational Foundations Learning Series for improved workplace literacy and readiness skills.
- WWRC completed a pilot study regarding the feasibility of a substance abuse (SA) program for individuals with traumatic brain injury (TBI). Its purpose was to determine: 1) the extent clients with TBI will benefit from the program; 2) if program participants would be prepared to engage in job seeking or career development and 3) the extent the existing facility structure and programming accommodates the SA treatment program. While the pilot study was substantially integrated into the routine and structure of WWRC daily activities and processes, a fully implemented program of 15-20 clients or more would present a significant challenge to these existing activities and processes.
- WWRC partnered with the DRS Charlottesville Field office to facilitate medical rehabilitation referrals from the University of Virginia Health South and Kluge Children's Rehabilitation Center to WWRC. This partnership resulted in 47 referrals to WWRC, a sustained average targeted census of 8-10 medical clients receiving attendant care and an increase in community outpatient referrals for medical evaluations and treatment.

2010 Roy J. Ward Awards

On May 10, 2010, DRS and the Virginia State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) presented its annual Roy J. Ward SRC Employee Leadership Recognition Awards for outstanding service and contribution to the field of vocational rehabilitation (VR) and the disability community. The SRC Employee Leadership Recognition Award honors select VR staff who have distinguished themselves not only by the quality of service they provide to VR clients, but by their contributions at the national, state, or local level to advance the employment and independence of people with disabilities.

Each recipient actively serves on boards and organizations. They provide expertise and leadership in community or agency-based initiatives that enhance the delivery of VR services and develop future leaders of VR. The award is named after Roy J. Ward, a long-time leader in the disability community, former member of the SRC and former chair of the DRS Board. The 2010 awardees were:

2010 Award Winners: Joe Fangman, Donna Martin, Doug James, Kristi Lockhart and Sinclair Hubard, with Roy J. Ward

- ***Joe Fangman***, Stuarts Draft, VA – Fangman has worked at WWRC for 10 years as a senior physical therapist, enhancing and promoting recreational activities for individuals with disabilities. He runs an adaptive ski program at Wintergreen Resort and as vice president of the Mid-Atlantic Wheelchair Athletics Association, he led the 37th Mid-Atlantic Wheelchair Games at WWRC. He is currently working to develop Virginia's first Wheelchair Tennis Program.

- ***Sinclair Hubard***, Harrisonburg, VA – Hubard is a DRS disability program navigator (DPN). For the past five years, Hubard led the efforts to establish DPN services in Virginia's One-Stop Centers to direct jobseekers with disabilities to employment services and resources. She trained One-Stop staff on customer service to people with disabilities; developed cross-agency teams to blend resources around an individual job seeker's employment needs; and was instrumental in establishing the first Assistive Technology kits in the One-Stops and training staff on its use.

- ***Doug James***, Fairfax County, VA – James is a regional director in Northern Virginia, with more than 22 years experience directing and providing quality services to increase employment opportunities for VR clients. He is a recognized leader on numerous boards and advisory councils, including the Northern Virginia Workforce Investment Board. He helped develop an outreach and training plan for serving individuals with limited English proficiency and initiated an outreach program to Hispanic community organizations. As president of the Virginia Association of Rehabilitation Leadership, he also helped revitalized the organization as a whole.

- ***Kristi Lockhart***, Richmond, VA – Lockhart is a statewide transition coordinator with more than 15 years experience working with students with disabilities. During her previous role as VR counselor, she established an internship program that provided workplace learning experiences for students with disabilities. She also managed to sustain and expand the number of students served in that program through collaboration with the local schools system and Community Services Board. Her creativity and initiative in serving youth with disabilities contributed to the overall improvement of transition services in Virginia.

- ***Donna Martin***, Stuart, VA – Martin has served as a VR counselor at DRS since September 1992, working with youth and adults with disabilities in Patrick County and the City of Martinsville. Martin was responsible for bringing DRS' Job Seeking Skills Program to Patrick Henry County Schools. She has been active in the Workforce Investment Area 17 Youth Program since its inception. She was instrumental in the development of the Blue Ridge Southwest Ethics Services Committee, and for more than five years she has served as the liaison for the Martinsville Henry County Disability Services Board. Martin is currently working with the Patrick Henry Community College and MARC Workshop to increase apprenticeship opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

Fifth Annual Disability Employment Champions Awards

On Oct. 7, DRS and Dominion hosted the Fifth Annual Disability Employment Champions Awards, honoring 10 new individuals and organizations for outstanding business practices that support the employment and advancement of people with disabilities. The event took place in Richmond and served as the official kick-off to October Disability Employment Awareness Month in the Commonwealth.

Secretary of Health and Human Resources Dr. Bill Hazel joined about 155 guests at this year's ceremony. Community leaders attending came from businesses such as Comcast, Long & Foster, ARAMARK and Comfort Suites; and organizations such as AARP, Community College Workforce Alliance and the Virginia Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Local singer/songwriter Leslie Tucker, a former DRS client, shared her talents with the audience.

The 2010 Disability Employment Champions Award recipients are listed below. Honorees this year included four business partners involved in the Project SEARCH program, a one-year training program for high school seniors with significant disabilities to gain hands-on work experience in a professional workplace setting and receive useful feedback on their performance. Photos from this event are online at www.vdrs.org/champs.htm.

2010 Disability Employment Champions Award Winners

Regional Business Awards:

- HandCraft Cleaners (Central Region)
- Professional Contract Services, Inc. (Hampton Roads Region)
- The Melting Pot (Blue Ridge Region)
- Wells Fargo –Wachovia (Southwest Region)
- Federal Transit Administration (Northern VA Region)

Partnership Awards—Project SEARCH:

- Bon Secours Richmond Health System
- VCU Health System
- Chesterfield County
- Sentara CarePlex Hospital

Self-Employment Enterprise Award:

- Nick Ibarra, Owner, Cortes de Nico Salon/Barbershop, Waynesboro

Project SEARCH: An Employment Model that Works

Fourteen years ago, Erin Riehle, director of the Emergency Department at Cincinnati Children's Hospital, became increasingly frustrated by the high turnover rate in entry-level jobs for restocking supplies. Her solution was to hire individuals with disabilities to fill the positions. With support and assistance from community groups that represented persons with disabilities, her idea of filling a handful of jobs quickly evolved into a comprehensive employment program model called Project SEARCH. More than a decade later, it has become a nationally recognized program replicated more than 150 times, across 39 states and four countries.

The Project SEARCH program provides opportunities for high school students with disabilities to gain work experience and develop professional skills that will lead to future competitive employment. Students participate in the program for one year during their senior year. The hands-on training typically takes place in a healthcare or business setting where total immersion in the workplace facilitates teaching and learning through continuous feedback and application of new skill.

In 2008, DRS partnered with schools, an Employment Services Organization and employer to launch the first Project SEARCH program in Virginia. Its application and success relied on collaborative teamwork by all participating groups. Chesterfield County's Government Center served as the first employer host site, with eight students participating in the program. Following that success, seven other Project SEARCH sites emerged across the Commonwealth over the next three years:

- Sentara CarePlex Hospital, Hampton;
- MCV-VCU Health System, Richmond;
- Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital, Henrico;
- New River Valley Carilion Medical Center, Montgomery County;
- Sentara Norfolk General Hospital, Norfolk;
- Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital, Roanoke; and
- Sentara Williamsburg Regional Medical Hospital, Williamsburg/ James City County/York County.

Jennifer McDonough of VCU-RRTC, Wes Thiss of Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital with Project SEARCH 2010 Bon Secours graduates Ben Woolf and Ann Marie Chevalier.

In Virginia, more than 100 students have graduated from Project SEARCH. Many have found full or part-time positions in competitive employment. Rhonda Muldrow, a DRS client who graduated in June, secured a job as a line-server at Piccadilly restaurant as a result of her experience. (Read her success story on page 21.) All of the students who graduated in June from the program at Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital received job offers from the hospital. Watch a 3-minute video of the graduation ceremony at www.bonsecoursgoodsharing.org/author/ndawson/.

Client Success Story

Carolyn Gates-Terry

Carolyn had 20 years experience working as a case manager, but when she came to DRS, she had not worked for almost a year and was about to lose her unemployment benefits. Health-related issues including diabetes, asthma, arthritis, high blood pressure and depression, as well as limitations in her mobility and stamina to work a full 8-hour day, made it difficult for her to find and keep a job. Despite these challenges and her doctor's advice to apply for disability benefits, Carolyn remained determined to work.

Following a needs assessment and vocational guidance from her counselor, Carolyn decided she wanted to return to work as a case manager. She received assistance with revising her resume as well as job placement and other supportive services.

Carolyn found full-time work as a case manager with Families in Transition, a community-based program that provides support to families affected by domestic violence. A DRS rehabilitation engineer assessed Carolyn's new workplace and recommended an ergonomic chair, fan, footrest and a small air filter for her office. A new computer allows her to telecommute when needed.

Today Carolyn works 40 hours a week and her benefits include medical and life insurance and paid leave. Carolyn writes of her experience with DRS: "Thank you for all of the support you have given to help me achieve my goal of remaining in the workforce … I am honored to have had such great support and respect throughout this entire effort."

Htay Lwin

When Htay Lwin moved with his family to Charlottesville last year, he had a cognitive disability and limited hearing in both ears. As a Burmese immigrant, he also spoke very little English.

Htay was referred to DRS by the International Rescue Committee, an organization that assists refugees in getting settled and employed once they relocate to a new area. Through interpreter services, DRS worked with Htay to address his disability-related needs to help him find employment. DRS purchased a hearing aid to improve his communication and awareness of environmental sounds. DRS also assisted with medical expenses to treat an ear infection that prevented him from using the hearing aid. Through job placement and training services, Htay was hired in April as a stock handler at K-Mart. DRS provided a button that Htay wears to alert customers that that he is hard of hearing and speaks limited English but can find a colleague to assist the customer if needed.

Htay works 24-36 hours a week at K-Mart, earning $7.25 per hour. He will be eligible for health benefits after one year of employment. Long-term follow-along services will focus on maintaining his position. His supervisors remain supportive of his needs and describe him as a hard worker who is well-liked by K-Mart's staff and customers. When the VR counselor told Htay that she was ready to close his case, Htay said: "Thank you for the job … I like it and it keeps me busy. [It's] good."

Client Success Story

Dr. Bertram Spetzler

As a successful orthopedic surgeon, Dr. Bertram Spetzler was a world traveler and a community volunteer who loved dancing and bicycling. But in October 2008, his world suddenly changed when he sustained a spinal cord injury during a serious bicycling accident. After three months of physical therapy at the Shepherd Center in Atlanta, he returned home determined to move forward and regain a professional career.

He met with DRS to identify goals for employment, transportation, physical rehabilitation and independence. He was referred to a benefits specialist for consultation on employment, Social Security Disability Insurance and Medicare. Staff from Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center (WWRC) worked with him to address his assistive technology needs and aided him through the process to obtain modifications to his van. WWRC also provided training on how to use the equipment and operate the vehicle safely.

When a job as a medical consultant opened at DRS' Disability Determination Services (DDS) division, Dr. Spetzler applied for and won the position, bringing to DDS the invaluable resource of his medical experience. DRS identified his work site needs and created an accommodating workstation for him.

Dr. Spetzler now earns $60 an hour and generally works between 20 to 25 hours a week. His physical rehabilitation has progressed so that he drives himself to and from work and can perform many of his independent living needs. He remains committed to helping others and continues to volunteer by mentoring students in Roanoke College's athletic training program.

Rhonda Muldrow

Rhonda was referred to DRS as an applicant for the first Project SEARCH program at Sentara Careplex Hospital in Hampton. Project SEARCH provides high school seniors with disabilities the opportunity to gain skills and work experience in a real-world workplace environment.

During her first semester in the program, Rhonda completed an internship in the hospital's hematology/oncology department, where she removed and refreshed laundry bags, replenished stock of department materials and answered patient phone calls. During her internship, however, Rhonda often lacked motivation and failed to participate in class discussions. She also had problems with attendance and punctuality. Her VR counselor provided guidance and career advice to help improve her job skills and realize her vocational potential. Although she entered the program without a specific vocational goal, Rhonda became interested in food service and chose to spend her second internship as a line server in the hospital cafeteria. Her duties involved food preparation and serving and kitchen cleaning. Within weeks of beginning her food service internship, Rhonda's teacher, job coach and VR counselor noticed a vast improvement in her attitude and confidence. Her interpersonal and work skills improved and she clearly took pride in her work.

Through supported employment services, Rhonda got a job as a line server at Piccadilly before the end of her school year. She began a part-time job that offered the potential for advancement to a full-time job in food preparation. On her days off, she attended the Project SEARCH program to continue building her job skills.

In June, Rhonda returned to Sentara Hospital and proudly received her Project SEARCH completion certificate. When asked what she gained from her experience, she said, "Project SEARCH was good … I learned about having good manners and being kind to customers and managers. I was able to be more comfortable talking to customers because I did that when I worked in the cafeteria in the hospital."

The State Rehabilitation Council seeks your input to help improve services to Virginians with disabilities

Contact Us

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Website: www.va-src.org

Attend a Meeting or Public Hearing:

The State Rehabilitation Council meetings and public hearings are open to the public. SRC meetings are held in January, March, May, August and November. The public hearings generally are held in February and March. The meeting locations, dates and times are posted on the SRC website and on the DRS website and Commonwealth Calendar at:
www.vadrs.org/eventlist.aspx
www.virginia.gov/cmsportal3/cgi-bin/calendar.cgi

Apply for Membership:

If you are interested in becoming a member of the SRC, you may obtain an application form by calling the Secretary of the Commonwealth at 804-786-2441 or online at:
www.commonwealth.virginia.gov/StateGovernment/Appointments/appointments.cfm

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