

October 2009

Director's Message

A Special Message from the DVR Director

I began my tenure as the DVR Director just 4 years ago. Over these past four years, we have made measurable progress in key areas including providing more timely services to our customers, improving relationships with our partners and building the skills of our staff. We worked together to eliminate our waiting list and now can provide services as individuals with disabilities are ready for them. Through Project HIRE, we are maximizing the availability of our federal stimulus funds, broadening the base of the individuals we serve and expanding our service capacity for the future. I respect that this has been hard work for everyone and also incredibly rewarding. We will reap the benefits of our investments for years to come.

It is with mixed emotions that I share the news of my pending departure. This will likely be my last monthly Director's message. I have enjoyed being in communication with you regularly and value that these regular messages have been an important part of our progress as an organization.

On October 15, 2009, President Obama nominated me to serve as the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration with the U.S. Department of Education. The nomination now goes to the Senate for confirmation. I anticipate making the transition by the end of the year.

It is truly an honor to be asked to join the Administration and serve the VR program at the national level. Thank you for helping to make this all possible.

Federal Fiscal Year 09 was awesome!

As we start this new federal fiscal year, we can look back on federal fiscal year 09 with significant pride. We again passed our federal performance standards. In comparison to the year before, we substantially increased our levels of productivity in the key areas of applications, eligibilities, plans written, open plans and successful employment outcomes. With a focus on increased communication with our customers, we had a decrease in the number of dispute resolution proceedings. We still have critical areas in which we need and want to improve – these include our rehabilitation rate and the matches between our customers' abilities and their jobs at closure.

Here's a comparison between the past two years:

	FFY 08	FFY 09	% Change
Applications	9,654	12,013	24% increase
Eligibilities	7,869	10,399	32% increase
Plans Written	5,082	5,673	12% increase
Open Plans	6,199	7,520	21% increase
Rehabs	2,367	2,404	2% increase

Rehab Rate 60% 55% 5% points less

We did all this with a faltering state economy and the lingering impact of long-term vacancies due to the hiring freezes. And yet through hard work and determination – we not only survived, we thrived! Staff demonstrated the resiliency that is the hallmark of the VR profession. Thank you to each and every person that helped improve our performance and assist more DVR customers to access our services!

Strategies to Resolve the Critical Funding Shortfall

As I shared this summer as we entered this current biennium, the Legislature did not provide sufficient resources for DVR to match all the federal VR grant funds that we have available. The shortfall has significant possible consequences that could negatively impact services and staffing for our program. Fortunately, we have created a solution that buys us some time and delays the majority of the impact until late in the biennium.

With sincere thanks to our partners at the Department of Services for the Blind and even more thanks to the DSHS Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the leadership of their Director Eric Raff, we will be able to meet our full match requirements for our federal grants in FFY 2009 and 2010. Without their assistance, we faced a \$900,000 shortfall by September 30, 2009 and again September 30, 2010. We still face a state match shortfall of \$4 million in February 2011 but we are working with DSHS to identify possible solutions.

These are difficult financial times for everyone. Like other state programs dependent on state funds, we have developed reduction packages and continue to exercise prudence with our expenditures. And yet, we would be remiss if we did not do everything possible to keep our program budget fully funded. In recognition of the value of our program, DSHS is forwarding a decision package on our behalf for consideration in the Supplemental budget. The request is extremely modest in light of the overall state general funds provided to DSHS and represents less than 2% of the DSHS state general funds appropriation. We will keep you updated on the Legislature's progress in funding our decision package which would allow DVR to continue services without disruption through the biennium.

Hiring Plan Approved

Since the beginning of this state biennium (July 2009), we have been filling critical service delivery positions statewide. We anticipate continuing to fill vacancies and look forward to welcoming more permanent staff to DVR. Our recent New Employee Orientation offered State Office the opportunity to meet many of our new recruits and they are clearly going to be great assets to our work. Welcome one and all!

Recognizing Employers

Each year, the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment (GCDE) recognizes employers throughout the state for their outstanding contributions to the employment of individuals with disabilities. Again this year, GCDE and the Washington State Business Leadership Network partnered for a very successful awards program.

Hosted by and held at Microsoft, this year's program, held in early October, recognized the following employers:

Addus Healthcare
Battelle Memorial Institute
Cascade Gasket
City of Seattle
Companion Animal Wellness Center
Costco Wholesale, Inc.
Covenant Shores
Darcie's Laundry
Direct Interactions, Inc.
Enterprise Rent-A-Car
Edmonds Community College Center for Families
Five Star Janitorial Services
Fred Meyer
Haggen, Inc.
Haley's Corner Bakery
Home Depot
Hudson Photographic Artistry
Lowe's Home Improvement
Marlene's Market and Deli
McDonald's
MediTech Mobility
Navos
Northshore Family Center
Olympic Lodge
Provail
Providence Sacred Heart Medical Center and Children's Hospital
Social Security Administration
Southwest Washington Medical Center
Stevens County
Trader Joe's
Uptown Nutrition
Yakima Valley Memorial Hospital

DVR is pleased to offer our appreciation and thanks to each of these employers and the hundreds of other employers that hire our customers each year.

Welcome New WSRC Members

At the upcoming Washington State Rehabilitation Council (WSRC) quarterly meeting in Spokane, I look forward to meeting our newly appointed WSRC members. Governor Gregoire recently appointed five new members to the Council and reappointed two members for an additional term. They will join eight continuing members for a total of 15 WSRC advocates and policy partners with DVR. Members serve three-year terms and serve at the pleasure of the Governor.

Please join me in recognizing and thanking:

Jeff Abe-Gunter, reappointed

Martin McCallum, reappointed

Valerie Arnold, new member representing the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)

Vickie Foster, new member representing current or former customers of DVR

Mike Hudson, new member representing business and industry

Susan Kautzman, new member representing community rehabilitation programs

Vanessa Lewis, new member representing the state's Parent Training and Advocacy Coordinating Center

Jim Larson, Chair, continuing member

Don Brandon, continuing member

Sandra Carr, continuing member

Sharey Cleveland, continuing member

Rudy Hernandez, continuing member

Jerry Johnsen, continuing member

Bob Roberts, continuing member

Lynnae Ruttledge, ex-officio

Joelle Brouner, WSRC Executive Director

JoAnne Lang, WSRC Executive Assistant

State Plan Approved

We were pleased to receive notification from RSA that our State Plan has been approved and became effective October 1. Please visit our web site or contact Kelly Boston in State Office if you would like a copy, if you have questions or if you are interested in learning more about the State Plan. We develop our State Plan in collaboration with the Washington State Rehabilitation Council and value the guidance we receive in the public input and development process. Looking ahead, when Congress finally reauthorizes the Rehabilitation Act (maybe in early 2010?), we will likely have to develop another State Plan. Stay tuned!

Again – my thanks!

It's hard to imagine that I will soon be saying goodbye to Washington DVR. I have appreciated your support, your candor and your willingness to work with me. We are a stronger organization because of the investments we've made in our staff, our partnerships and our communities over these past four years. I will truly miss you and look forward to crossing paths in the future.

My best to each of you –
Lynnae Ruttledge, Director
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