OFFICE OF THE DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING

ODHH SYMPOSIUM:
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BREAKOUT SESSION: EMPLOYMENT
Lynnae Ruttledge, Stephen Roldan, Kelly Boston

TAKEN BY Judith Cederblom, MA, CCR, CART Provider

AFTERNOON BREAK-OUT SESSION

EMPLOYMENT

And the speakers are: Stephen Roldan, Lynnae Ruttledge and Kelly Boston.

LYNNAE RUTTLEGE: How about if I get started and introduce our other two presenters.

Remember the instructions from this morning, if you have a comment or question please raise your hand and signal to us, and then go ahead and you can make your comment.

I'm really, really glad to be here this afternoon.

I'd like to start with just talking a little bit about Vocational Rehabilitation because for quite a few years, we were in order of selection, and we've been out of order of selection now for almost two years. But we still run into people in the community who are convinced that we still have a waiting list and that there might be delays to getting services.

And I just wanted to start by saying: We are open for business. We want people to come to Voc Rehab for services because we know that people with disabilities can and will benefit from Voc Rehab services and can and will benefit Washington's economy when they are working.

So I just wanted to put in that plug for Voc Rehab.

We really do want to see more voc customers come through the door and we want to touch base with folks who have benefited from our services in the past and ask you to help us get the word out to more transitioning youth and others who may be able to benefit from our services.

We've got some plants in the audience. Staff people -- if you're a Voc Rehab person will you please raise your hand? So we have some in the way back and some in the way front and some in the middle, so we're kind of sprinkled through the audience. So don't be surprised if we call on you to either answer questions or ask you to make a comment as we move forward.

So before I turn the microphone over to Kelly Boston, I would like to acknowledge the partnership that Eric Raff referenced this morning in his comments between the Division and Voc Rehab and ODHH. Eric and I have forged a really positive relationship over these past four years.

Little did I know when I interviewed for this job four years ago right now and Eric was on the interview panel that he and I would become close friends and colleagues and partners in wanting to make sure that more folks could benefit from voc rehab services.

We went into the 2009-2011 biennium with a pretty significant shortfall in our budget. We didn't have all the dollars necessary to manage all available federal funds, and Eric and I worked together to be able to identify ways that ODHH could provide us with the resources to match our federal funds based on the dollars that we spend every year on sign language interpreter services as a part of our Title II, Americans with Disabilities Act reasonable accommodation responsibilities. And so we've been able to creatively leverage resources and then provide all the resources necessary so that we can match all available federal funds.

So I just wanted to acknowledge the leadership from Eric Raff and just the partnership between the Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services and Vocational Rehabilitation Division. So, just like to start there.

I'd also like to acknowledge Steve Roldan. Steve, stand up. Yay, Steve.

So Steve is a Division of Vocational Rehabilitation staff person, and he's going to talk a little bit about what his role is when he comes up. But I wanted to make sure that folks recognize that voc rehab have decided that we need to recreate the capacity for us to have a state coordinator in our field services unit so that our staff could get connected to the resources they need and get the technical assistance and the training and the coordination to be able to be a factor in serving people who are deaf, hard of hearing, late deafened, deaf-blind, folks

who come to us for services where our staff might not necessarily always know the right resources to put together.

So in years gone by we had had a state coordinator for the deaf, and it was a position that was in state office. So what we chose to do was to have Steve's position out in the field so that his connection will be with voc rehab counselors and with supervisors to help us fundamentally increase our capacity and to a better job at serving the community. He'll talk a little bit about his role.

But I know this morning we had a question about what Steve's role was, and I just wanted to start by acknowledging that Steve brings great strengths to our team and has really helped our capacity.

So I'm going to turn this over to Kelly Boston because she's going to do the session overview. I just did the opening credits, and now Kelly will tell us what we'll be talking about and really set the stage.

So, Kelly Boston, I'm going to turn the microphone over to you.

KELLY BOSTON: Thanks. I already feel like a success because I made it up three steps in heels without incident.

So thanks for being here today, thanks for your interest in employment. We obviously share your interest, and we love to talk about employment. And we also like to talk about the work that DVR is doing around employment, and a lot of it is in with many of your organizations and a lot of other organizations.

We really couldn't do it if it wasn't for the partners that we have out there helping us.

And another thing that we like to do is to hear from others who care about employment and who can help us learn how we can improve our services and how we can work together to get better outcomes, get better jobs, and how we're going to tap into better jobs that pay more for people who use DVR services and go on for employment.

We have saved a lot of time at the end of our presentation today to listen to you, to answer questions, to get some great ideas about priorities for DVR and how we're going to move into the future and enhance our services for everyone.

We're also going to ask Steve to talk a little bit more about his role as the statewide coordinator for deaf services and what DVR's capacity and resources are around the state.

We're going to talk about some of the current efforts that are underway now to enhance services and talk about some of the gaps that we have identified that we're going to be working on in the future.

One of my jobs in state office is as the planning and performance administrator. So that means that I deal with a lot of numbers. So they gave me, like five minutes to talk about one thing that's near and dear to my heart: Data. It won't take long and I promise it will not be painful.

A little bit about DVR and who we serve. DVR is an agency that serves people with all kinds of disability, all different kinds of disabilities.

As you can see the largest population of people we serve is individuals with mental illness, and they make up 32 percent of our total caseload.

Then individuals with cognitive impairments like developmental disabilities are 30 percent.

And individuals with mobility impairments, various kinds of physical disabilities is 23 percent.

Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind and deaf-blind make up 8 percent of the people that DVR serves.

And then people with all other disabilities are 7 percent of everybody that DVR serves.

In terms of the employment outcomes that people achieve after receiving DVR service, we've compared all of our DVR closures with the closures of individuals who are deaf and individuals who are hard of hearing, so the average wages that all of our closures average is $11.47 an hour. Individuals

who are deaf earn a little bit more per hour, $12.99, individuals who are hard of hearing at $12.23 per hour and that's based on 2009 closures in employment.

And the number of hours that people are working per week for all of our closures, it's 26. Individuals who are deaf work 27 hours a week, and individuals who are hard of hearing work 29 hours a week.

So you'll be excited to hear Lynnae talk a little bit later about some of the work we're doing to try to improved the outcomes that we're getting.

And then the success rate at DVR, this tells us as an agency how we're doing and how our services are helping people move into employment. So for everybody who comes to DVR, applies for services, and is determined eligible, we enter into an individualized plan for employment. So that plan tells DVR and the individual how they are going to get from where they are now to the employment outcome that they have established for themselves.

And for all of our closures, 55 percent of the people who enter our plan come out with a job.

For individuals who are deaf, 64 percent of the people that we serve in the plan become employed. And for individuals who are hard of hearing, 71 percent of the people that we have -- 71 percent of the individuals who enter a plan of services come out with a job.

So individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing are achieving success at a rate that's higher than our overall population.

And so now I'm very happy to introduce Steve, and Steve is going to show you his work as the State Coordinator for the Deaf.

Yay, Steve.

(Applause.)

STEPHEN ROLDAN: Thank you, Kelly.

I'm not as courageous as Lynnae and Kelly to come up here without a piece of paper to remind me what I'm supposed to be talking about, so bear with me on that.

My name has been kind of tossed around a little bit this morning from what I've seen. Maybe in the other meetings maybe my name came up, I don't know. So some of you may be wondering, wow, sounds like this guys does an awful lot of different things, and the answer to that is yes, that's true.

Officially my title is DVR Statewide Coordinator, and that was my primary role in DVR is to help with field services, help the counselors, staff. It doesn't matter where they are, I'm willing to go out there and I do go out to many different places.

I start my day in Olympia but you never know, I might wind up in Spokane, I might be in Vancouver, I might be up north, you never know where I'm going to be, wherever the division takes me.

I remember when I interviewed for the position one of the things emphasized to me about this role was that it would be evolving and would change over time. And I've noticed that that's very true. A lot of things have come and gone, but the primary focus has been of course focusing on our clients, people who come into our doors, and helping them, provide the best services that we can as an agency.

However, there's a lot of other things which I do as the statewide coordinator. I do an awful lot of outreach and working with our different partners and agencies. I see a lot of familiar faces out here in the crowd and I see a lot of familiar faces here at the conference today. And work with all the deafness centers that ODHH has set up, making sure that they are in harmony and working well with the offices locally.

I do a great deal of outreach working with WSD, and that's going to be something I'll touch on a little bit more later what my role is there.

Basically what my role and my capacity, I go where DVR needs me to go. If there's something that's going on that's deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, late deafened, any of those issues, that's what I'm going to go and do.

One of the big things that we look at with our counselors, our RCDs, we are very proud of at DVR. Lynnae introduced our staff -- I'm having a hard time seeing out there in the audience because of the lights -- but we're very proud of who they are and what they represent. They provide a great level of expertise and knowledge about deafness. So when somebody who's deaf comes into our door those RCDs have specifically received that training and they have that ability to go out there and meet those specific needs that are focused and related to deaf culture as well as I'm going to add on hard of hearing, deaf-blind and late deafened.

We're going to touch more -- I believe it's Kelly -- on the state model plan and including all those different groups and making sure that we are able to reach out to all those people.

(Interpreter switch).

STEPHEN ROLDAN: So going forward with our key partners -- of course ODHH, huge huge partner for us.

I really like to say that our partners, our key partners are anybody out there in the state of Washington who provide services for those populations who are focused on deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, late deafened.

I also do a lot of networking with people who are out of state. I want to find out what is going on with other states, what's happening with Oregon, what's happening with Minnesota, what's happening with New Jersey. And that helps me get some ideas of what's going on out there so we stay current, and also so that we stay on top of things here in Washington. I'll go over that a little bit later on what we've done to improve services as an agency.

But again ODHH is the primary partner. We love them and we love our folks in our deafness centers who are out there helping us every day and are constantly looking to improve those relationships.

I'm going to be -- my role as the key person for DVR -- to go out there and help make that happen, but I cannot do it without everyone else. To try to do this role by myself, that's just -- that's an impossible job.

I rely heavily upon all the staff, the RCDs, the supervisors, everyone else who help make this happen. So it's not just a one-man show even though I may have that title, I really have to credit to all the staff who are helping me do my job.

So with that, I'd like to go ahead and move on and turn it over to Lynnae, who is going to talk about Project Hire. And I'm sure you might have some thoughts about that, we'll talk about that when we open it up later on.

LYNNAE RUTTLEGE: All right. This is like talking heads or moving bodies, one or the other.

Once upon a time, President Obama came into office, and worked with Congress to establish resources call stimulus funds, or ARRA funds, the Americans Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Essentially what those dollars were designed to do was jump-start the economy, provide resources so that people could get jobs quicker and would be able to transform systems with one-time only dollars.

And one of the really cool things that happened was that Congress said: We're going to give resources to the state VR programs to be able to transform their systems, and assist more people in getting employment.

So Washington DVR had the benefit of $8.9 million that we received this year, that we have two years to spend.

And when we sat and thought about how would we best make investments in getting more people employed, what we thought about was that first slide that you saw, that we had so many people that came to VR for services, but the end result was that they were only making 11 or 12, maybe 12 and a half dollars an hour; generally working part-time, usually 26, 27, 28 hours a week.

And we wanted to impact that.

Now, we clearly know that there are many people with significant disabilities that rely on Social Security benefits. And when you have to rely on Social Security benefits, you also have to be concerned about the impact of wages on your benefits.

So we have a lot of people that we serve that consciously choose to work less hours per week than what they are able to because they want to protect those benefits.

But we also know that that's just an average, and so when we are having an average of 27, 28, 29 hours a week, there's still a lot of people that we're serving that work full-time.

So we wanted to figure out a way that we could use our stimulus funds to create some incentives for people to choose to work full-time and to work with some new partners who could help us do job development, job placement in jobs where people would make mid- to high-range salaries with benefits, working full-time, in demand occupations.

Because if you sat and talked with the governor or listened to the governor, what she always talks about is, we're going to get through this. We're going to get through the recession. We need to be planning for where Washington is going to be three years from now, five years from now when the economy has recovered, and our goal with voc rehab is to make sure that people with disabilities are part of that economic recovery.

So we chose to develop what's called Project Hire, H-I-R-E, and "hire" stands for hiring individuals with disabilities ready for employment. And we've chosen to contract with organizations throughout the state in four rounds of contracts to help us work with people that have finished academic programs, who have credentials, who are ready for full-time work but just haven't been able to get those connections.

And what we wanted a chance to be able to do was work with some new partners to figure out how to make those connections work.

So in this first round of contracts that started in July and August -- each one of the rounds of contracts are for six months -- we've contracted with Hearing, Speech and Deafness Center up in Seattle.

Because what we knew is that they had the two important ingredients: They had connections to the deaf community, the hard of hearing community, the deaf-blind community. They would be able to identify people who already have those credentials but were either underemployed or unemployed. So they had the connections with the community.

And they also had the ability to connect with business and industry. Because they have members on their board, they have people that come to their store, they have connections in the community with major employers.

And so we've contracted with Hearing, Speech and Deafness to work with 15 individuals with an expectation that 11 of them will become successfully employed within these next six months.

And if you think back to the success rate that Kelly talked about, for everybody that goes into a plan right, now our average is only about 55 percent, and with the deaf community and hard of hearing community we're better than that.

Well, we want to be even better. We want to get up to at least 73, 75 percent. Because we know that's possible.

We know that there are people out in the community who have disabilities who are eligible for voc rehab services but haven't benefited from VR a lot of times because you felt discouraged when you came to VR in the past several years when we had a waiting list. Sometimes you didn't get the kinds of services or programs you needed to as a result of VR services.

So we wanted to reconnect with folks.

So the Hearing, Speech and Deafness Center is one of our contractors, and they are working with people in Bellingham, Seattle and Tacoma with their

contract. And their goal is to help 15 people become served by them and 11 of them become employed.

And I'm going to be really excited when we get to mid to late January and we see the outcomes for each one of these projects. Because my sense is that folks are just starting to put it together. We have problems with the economy and it's been difficult for folks to make the connections, but we're already starting to see outcomes.

And our commitment to Hearing, Speech and Deafness Center is if they are able to achieve the outcomes and they want to continue to contract with us, we want to continue to contract with them in the next round of contracts.

Because we really know when you look at the outcomes for folks who are deaf, hard of hearing, late deafened, deaf-blind, they have great outcomes, and we want to help be part of that success.

So I just wanted to share that that was a real targeted and deliberate approach for voc rehab to partner with the deaf community around, make sure that we had a strategy to help folks who had finished academic programs get connected with those good jobs with benefits with working full-time.

So that's Project Hire.

I'm going to turn it back to Steve to talk a little about an update on our technology and our website.

STEPHEN ROLDAN: This is something I get excited about because this part we're talking about results in seeing things happen within our agency.

When I first began this position I had a vision of what I wanted to see happen, and one of the primary things was being able to provide better accessibility for our customers, be it through better services at the offices, better accessibility to their clients, better linking with their counselors.

I'm curious about one thing, if I could ask those folks here who are deaf and use technology to communicate with other folks, how many of you here are still using TTY as a primary form of communication? One, two, three? A few.

How many use another method of communication? Many, many more. Okay. And that's where we wanted to go.

We wanted to make sure is that we were caught up with technology with our agency. So one of things that I was working on and working closely with my boss, David Hankinson -- David, throw up your hand real fast so people know who you are.

We were talking about getting video phones set up for our counselors because that's where the deaf community is going. We wanted to make sure that we provided that accessibility for our deaf community to come in and directly talk with your counselors via video phone. So we have that set up now, and we have that capacity to have our counselors to be able to reach out to everybody who wants to be able to chat through video phone, talk to their counselor through video phone.

We still keep and we still have those TTY lines set up, but we recognize the shift is going toward alternate technologies.

So we have those video phones set up for that purpose, and we are looking at now being able to add video phones for our RCDs who are not deaf or hard of hearing but have signing skills.

So we are really moving in the right direction I feel in the terms of technology and accessibility, and we want to continue to improve on that. Your feedback is going to be important for that?

So as we move forward with these technologies and accommodations that we provide, please let us know how we're doing.

One thing we have set up recently as website for our public address on the internet. If you go underneath there it says People with Disabilities, and you click on that and up will pop a series of questions. And it says, there's a question, or it says, I believe How can I get deaf services? What about deaf services? And you click on that, up will pop our page.

When I say our page, that's our RCD page. And you're going to see on that page pictures and contact information for all the RCDs we have statewide and for the counselors who have been designated in the various offices who are not necessarily RCDs themselves but are designated to work with deaf and hard of hearing populations.

And it will have their contact information, e-mail, video phone, TTY, whatever you need to be able to contact them.

And also you will be able to see on the site there, does that person sign, yes or no. And I know that's a very critical important part of being able to provide those services. People want to receive those services in ASL if they are looking for ASL. So you'll be able to find that information there as well.

And we'll continue to update that information as we have staff added on and staff leave.

So that page is there for you to access and to be able to provide you with the ability to find out where our RCDs are at. Before, we didn't have that ability.

You had to go and ask -- I've gotten a lot of calls over the past two years, people ask me, Where's the closest RCD, where do I find the counselor who understands ASL?

I'm hoping that this website will provide greater access and faster answers for everybody.

And in terms of other technologies, we really want to be able to be forward-thinking and be progressive with how we're addressing our accessibility and being able to link up with the community. So this isn't all, this is just the beginning.

I feel that we're -- as we look at other states and what other states are doing, I feel that we're catching up. And if not we've passed a few other states, I'm proud to say. Not many states can say they have a website that's specifically geared for the RCDs or for the deaf community. We have that and we are very proud and very pleased of that.

But that doesn't mean we are going to be finished. We're going to continue on with that.

Up next we've got Kelly coming back here to talk about the higher education agreement. Have any of you heard about that? Probably not.

Kelly, I'll let you talk about that.

KELLY BOSTON: One of the other partnerships that DVR has been able to develop fairly recently is a partnership with two- and four-year public institutions of higher education.

So two-year technical community colleges and four-year colleges and universities in Washington state that receive public funds.

And that -- we have an agreement that covers all of those schools, which was no easy feat, if you can imagine, trying to get I don't know how many, 50 schools to sign one agreement.

But the agreement helps us work with our joint customers, individuals who are being served by DVR and who are students in higher education to ensure that they get accommodations and the access they need, the communications access they need to be successful in college.

So the agreement covers sign language interpreters, captioning, and Braille. And the agreement provides that the college has primary responsibility to provide and pay for those services that students need as a public institution.

But then when those costs reach a certain level or at a certain threshold, then DVR has agreed that we will step in and we will share the costs of the services once they reach that level.

Right now we've established a threshold at $7500. We want our partner programs, our disability student programs to be strong and be successful and have good services available that are there for all of our students with disabilities, whether customers of DVR other not. We want to make sure we are partnering with them to keep those programs are strong.

And it also has helped us and them be able to track the costs that they are actually spending and we are spending for students who are in higher education.

So when they go back to their colleges and make requests for funds that they need to properly accommodate people and when we go to the legislature and ask them for funds that we need to properly accommodate people, we didn't go there with actual good information about what the actual costs are. Prior to having this agreement and really having to sit down and figure out what our costs were and their costs were, we really didn't have that information.

So in addition to providing better accommodations, keeping the accommodations really as high quality and keeping the overall programs strong, it's really helping us gather the data and information we're going to need to go forward and get funding for these programs that's needed.

STEPHEN ROLDAN: Back over to me.

Feels like open mike night, you know, going back and forth. I feel like I should say something funny or tell a joke or say hi to my mom. Sorry.

Going on to, as I mentioned before, about Washington state -- excuse me, not Washington state, Washington School for the Deaf -- we've had some changes down there and in how we handle our transition with Washington state -- why do I keep saying Washington state? With WSD. Okay.

What we're doing now is we are trying our best to get everybody paired up with a counselor from their hometown whereas in the past we -- you remember when we had the order of selection wait list, we encouraged people to apply early when they were juniors so when they graduate the timing hopefully would be perfect so they would come off the waiting list and then be ready for services to begin.

Well, since the waiting list is gone, no longer there, and we're open for business now, you just come on down and sign an application, there was no need to do that system anymore. And some of you might remember we had our

counselor down in Vancouver, Kay Kennedy. She handled all the applications down there at WSD. That was a lot of work, an awful lot of work for her.

So now we've switched over to the system where we're going to be working close with WSD, identifying which students need and are ready for applications for DVR. And then my role is going to be able to connect them with the counselors statewide, finding out where the hometowns are.

I met with three students last week who have hometowns that are very rural and don't have an RCD. So part of my role is to go down there find out what is going on, what services will be necessary, and then help them transfer over to their counselor when they move out to WSD.

So the program started off and it's working really nicely. We're looking forward to working with WSD. Some of you may have heard their presentation this morning and talked about what we're doing with them. And how this last year, last spring we met down at WSD on the campus so we could have all our counselors meet face-to-face with the students.

It was really, really cool. It was a really cool trip. We got a lot out of it, and we really would like to continue to do that and have that relationship with WSD.

So one of big things that brought this to pass was, again, that connectedness.

See, there's that underlying and ongoing theme: We want to connect with the community. We want to reconnect with the deaf community and make sure that we are accessible to everybody in the community.

So it's important that we maintain that, and that you feel if there's something going on and you're not sure, please, let us know. Tell your counselors, talk to the people at DVR, talk to me. We're open to that, and we want to have feedback from you to continue to improve our services.

So next up, we have here, looks like we have tag team again. Ms. Lynnae, you're up.

LYNNAE RUTTLEGE: We're getting close to the part where we're going to start asking you for input because we've been giving you lots and lots information to share with you. But I wanted to share with you kind of a forward thought that we had.

What we know as an unmet need in state government and especially here in the Department of Social and Health Services is that many times people who are deaf have a need for sign language interpreter services, people who are hard of hearing have needs for assistive technology, people who are deaf-blind have need for interpreters and technology.

And a lot of times what we sense is that a hiring manager will look at a really qualified person and then go, oh, no, how am I going to afford interpreter services, CART services, technology. And they will look at two equally qualified folks, even someone who is more qualified, and make a decision that we know is the wrong decision because they choose to not hire that person because they don't know how they are going to afford the accommodation costs.

So what we said in DVR in partnership with ODHH is, what if we had a resource pool that the department could use -- because we wanted to start first with the Department of Social & Health Services -- what if we developed a resource pool that the department could develop where all of the programs and all of administrations could pay into that pool and that would then be a resource pool for any hiring manager who wanted to make the choice of hiring someone but not have to worry about how they were going to afford the sign language interpreter and the assistive technology, other resources to support that person.

We thought it would give us a way to, first of all, start to collect data across the department about how many staff we have who we're accommodating and what those costs are.

And then also find a way to be able to use that as an attractive mechanism to attract more people to come to work for DSHS because you know that we'd be

a welcoming environment where managers weren't making those decisions based on what they thought they could or couldn't afford.

So it's just in concept form right now. It's something that Dave Brown and other folks who have been working with DSHS over the last several years have talked about in the past.

So we're bringing the idea back and we're starting to look at how could we do this, how could we put this in place, how could we fund it, how could we attract the resources that would make this all possible. And then how could we over time continue to attract more people to come to work for DSHS because we were a welcoming and inviting work environment.

And that's really what the goal is. We want to make sure that more people with disabilities see DSHS as a model employer. And developing a resource pool is one of those ways that we want to test that.

So it's just in concept form right now. We were actually asked to figure out how to reduce costs, and we figured out this probably wasn't going to reduce costs, it was probably to potentially even increase costs because we want more people to come and work for DSHS who need sign language interpreters and CART services and assistive technology.

But over time what we think will happen is that our customer satisfaction will go up, our ability to attract qualified quality candidates will go up, staff morale will go up, and communities will have greater confidence in the services that DSHS provides.

So we thought it was a real win for the department, not necessarily one of the ways that they were going to overall reduce their costs but one of the ways that they could effectively provide services and connect better to the community.

So I just wanted to share that with you because I think that this is one of those things that's going to take some time to put together, but over time what our goal is is to increase the employment of people with disabilities in DSHS.

We want people to actively see DSHS as a model employer, a place you want to come to work, not just in VR but also in children's, also in economic services, also in other programs that really make our state a really good place to live and work and support.

So I just wanted to share that with folks because that's just one of those things that it's an unmet need that we saw, and it was a creative way of leveraging -- I'm always into leveraging other people's money -- so I'm leveraging other resources from other people to help put this together. But I think it really has some promise so I wanted to share that with you.

And Steve's going to talk for a few minutes about community rehabilitation program capacity and the availability of certified interpreters. And Kelly will then talk about model service plan, and then we'll open it up to you.

Steve?

STEPHEN ROLDAN: Okay.

Some of you may remember in the years past that Washington had many, many different services available, not specifically just from DVR but from different community providers that were out there: job placement, independent living, just a wide variety of services. That happened a long time ago.

And where we are today, well, it's not such a light and bright world as it was in the past.

So I'm kind of hoping that we will be able to look to the future and continue to improve and get back to the golden days of services and providing services for those who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind and late deafened through improved services that are available out in the community.

As a counselor before I accepted this position, I remember the frustrations having so few resources to be able to use that were truly appropriate for deaf services for folks who were deaf. Many of the counselors out there were frustrated as well.

For example, if you were to refer somebody for an evaluation, and that person does not conduct that evaluation in their language be it ASL or any other given language, the evaluator has to sign off on that evaluation to say, this or the results may not be entirely valid because it was not conducted in that person's given language.

So one of the things we found is that there have been many people out there in the community who really aren't quite up to their knowledge where they should be for deaf culture, and awareness with deaf issues.

As an example I had one guy who came up to me and said: I think this guy has a learning disability. I said, Why do you think that? He said, Well, look at his English. His English is terrible, that's a learning disability right there.

And I looked at the English and I said, This isn't English, this is deaf English. Let's talk to him in ASL.

Looking at him and talking with him in ASL I saw absolutely nothing to indicate that there was a learning disability. I see counselors shaking their heads out there, they've had that same experience.

One of the things when I first started this position I looked at the situation with our providers out there in the community, and I realize we really don't have a lot going on out there. So that was one of my goals, to step up and try to provide better services and improve our services that are available out there.

And we've come a long ways, I feel. We've got some development going for folks who are job developers, making them more aware about the issues that have come up.

We now have a psychologist that is working with us. He's deaf. He understands deafness, he's deaf himself. So we're getting better results for our evaluations that we send folks out for.

We're slowly turning the tide and improving these services.

Again, this is just the beginning. I feel that we have a long way to go in improving our services, but we want to continue to move and stay positive.

Again, this is where you come in. You're thinking well, what can I do? Communicate with us. We want to be able to help provide and improve services. How? Through your feedback, through your ideas, through people you might know.

We want to be able to work with you because this is not just a us-telling-you kind of show. We want to work together as a team. We cannot do this job together if you're not part of it. So we invite you to come and be a part of what we're doing here in building up services and improving employment services for the deaf community in the state of Washington.

In order for us to do that we want to have something to base on how we can improve our services. Recently there was a state model plan that was released from the top deaf professionals in the nation, and it described more about what the services should look like on a statewide level.

Kelly's going to talk a little bit more about that, the model service plan.

KELLY BOSTON: Last but not least.

When Lynnae asked me if I would join her and Steve today, I quickly contacted Steve and made sure he wanted to be my new best friend for the next couple of weeks in preparing for today.

And it's been really fun working with Steve and learning what he's been doing over the last couple of years since he's been in this appointment and mostly just seeing how strongly he feels about it, how much passion he has for improving services and how much energy he brings to his position in helping us move forward.

One of the things that he shared with me was this big document -- I only brought the cover sheet because it's so heavy I probably couldn't carry it all the way in here, and my dog's been eating it.

And the document is called the Model State Plan for VR Services to Persons Who Are Deaf, Deaf-Blind, Hearing, or Late Deafened. And it was developed, it was published by the University of Arkansas Rehabilitation

Research and Training Center. And it was done in collaboration with the leading experts in the field nationally, with VR agency staff, counselors for the deaf, statewide coordinators like Steve.

And they pulled together all of their best knowledge, their best learning, and put those best practices in this document for state agencies to use as a guide and as a way to evaluate their own services and programs and determine where they might need to make some improvements, where we have some gaps, and what we need to work on.

It addresses areas like communications access, like technology, the qualifications and skills of our staff, the qualifications and skills that our partners, community rehab programs and all of those areas, and gives us some really good, solid foundation so that we can start building our program to be in line with this state model plan.

So Steve has already been using this as a guide in the way that he does his work on a day-to-day basis and when he provides training and consultation out in the field.

But now it's really time for DVR to make a commitment to taking this to the division-wide level, looking at how we're going to use this document in our overall planning so we can make sure that DVR division-wide, statewide is taking advantage of this information and at least taking the first steps and moving toward an organization that has the best practices for individuals who are deaf, deaf-blind, hard of hearing, and late deafened.

So we're definitely working in moving in the right direction and will be working on it over the coming year.

So I think I need you guys to come back up. David, would you like to join us?

LYNNAE RUTTLEGE: I'm always into leveraging talent. And David Hankinson, whom I think most of you if not all know, David Hankinson. David? Yay, David.

David is our Area One manager and he's the first one to tell you that he has an area that goes from South King County -- you have to do the graphic here, David -- South King County all the way down to Olympia, all the way up into the Peninsula --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Excuse me, you're in front of the captioning.

LYNNAE RUTTLEGE: So David's area goes all the way from South King County, Seattle, south of Seattle and SeaTac and Kent, all the way down to Tacoma, all the way down to Olympia, all the way up to the Peninsula, to Port Angeles, Port Townsend, Sequim, Forks -- you name it, he's covering it -- and all the way down to Vancouver.

So he has this huge geographic area. But more importantly he has this huge heart of wanting to make sure that the services we provide are appropriate and effective.

And since David is a nationally recognized star -- and do you guys all know that he's a nationally recognized star? He did the first ever public service announcement in ASL, and it got -- I don't know, hundreds of thousands of hits on YouTube. I mean, the guy, he's a rock star. So I thought that since he's a rock star he should be up here with us.

(Applause.)

So you guys have to understand, this is how I work every single day. I sing, I dance, I make people come up on stage. But we've got about a half an hour, and what we wanted to do was just hear from you: your thoughts, your comments, your questions.

And I've seen some hands raising already. So I'm going to play Vanna White and I'm going to run around with the microphone.

INTERPRETER: Vanna, you have to make sure who's deaf and who's hearing before you hand them the mike.

LYNNAE RUTTLEGE: Sure, I can do that!

AUDIENCE MEMBER: My name is ROBERT ROTH. I work with the University of Washington summer academy for deaf and hard of hearing in computing.

I want to go back to Steve Roldan's comment about working with DVR going to the Washington School for the Deaf. And I'm wondering what kind of efforts are being made to meet with mainstream, students who are mainstreamed into public schools that are deaf or hard of hearing.

One of the persons last year in the summer academy, he was deaf and he had no idea about the VR services. I forgot the phrase you used, order of selection maybe.

But he had no idea about VR services and he was attending Everett Community College. Very brilliant guy with quite a future in computing. So I told him about VR's services, and in the past few months he has applied for that.

But the question I have is, how can we reach out to these students who are mainstream -- not mainstream but who are in public school programming, sometimes with or without interpreters. Sometimes their teachers, especially in rural areas, have no idea about VR services.

How can we reach out to those? And certainly the second part of that question is, how can I help you with that in the future, so I can get good students in our program, my program as well?

LYNNAE RUTTLEGE: Great question.

STEPHEN ROLDAN: Okay.

Well, one of the things that we looked at when we're talking about the services that are happening statewide, part of what we're doing is identifying where our gaps are, and that is clearly -- that's a gap.

And so the answer for all these questions -- well, first off, just to preface this, we don't have the answers for everything today but we want to identify where those gaps are and then of course come up with a plan because it would be kind of impossible to say this is how we're going to do it if we haven't talked about it before.

So this is a great question. We have a great many different ways that we can help out with the schools I believe, and a lot of different ways how we can partnership up with them.

With our most recent project -- I'm getting confused with Project Hire, I'm thinking -- yeah, the paying for the interpreting costs for Project Search also.

And then Project -- I forget, there's so many acronyms. I always want to say "pie" -- but it's PIHE: Public Institute for Higher Education in helping out with the interpreting costs.

So that's one example of how we've begun to partnership with the schools and to develop those relationships, working relationships. And so our plan is to continue with that. We want to improve on that, working with and start with that.

One of the purposes is, and remember, Lynnae came to me and said we want this agreement, not to be just dollars and cents but also to be used as a tool for our counselors, our staff, to be able to connect with the schools and begin moving on and moving forward with that.

So yeah, you're right, we have a long ways to go with that. So I would be happy to sit down with you and other people and talk about it and see what we would be able to come up with together, a nice plan together.

DAVE HANKINSON: Okay, I guess I'll start over.

Rob, I wanted to add to Steve's answer. Right now DVR has counselors, a variety of offices throughout the state.

Some offices have counselors who are school liaisons, and they work with the public schools throughout the state.

We recognize that we are trying to have counselors that have a relationship with all the public schools. What Steve's trying to do is work with the counselors and the RCDs and the various offices.

Sometimes we have an office that doesn't have an RCD, but the counselor will have connections or a relationship with the school, and they have that deaf

person there. How are they going to know about deaf services? So the counselor reports that to the local RCD or talks to Steve. And then Steve makes that recognition and tries to make the connection.

We do need to do a better job in informing the schools and say hey, if you have a deaf person that may need VR services, contact Steve.

One other way we can try is maybe set up the website and advertise via the internet a little more. That's one recognized venue for kids to tap into, but we can get the word out that way.

Unfortunately, when we get order of selection many deaf people had to wait such a long time for services, and we recognize that deaf people weren't happy about that at all. And we know the rumor out there in the deaf community will say, Don't bother trying to get in to VR, you're going to have to wait a long time, if you ever get any.

So it was like the communication between DVR and the deaf community completely severed and we recognize that we have a lot of work to do to get your trust back, so we need help in that area.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: My name is ANTHONY [BONDRA], and I work as a client advocate for HSDC. And I cover five different counties, Kitsap, Jefferson, Clallam, King, Snohomish.

And I notice that a lot of rural areas that need a lot of people that they are completely inept to deaf issues.

And I understand that you, Steve, as the statewide coordinator, that you're responsible for networking to those various folks. And I'm just asking a question, since you're the only one for the entire state, how is that possible? You know, is there other people that work with you? Because that's spreading you mighty thin.

There's a lot of rural areas. A lot of people out there, deaf people and the people working with them that are clueless.

STEPHEN ROLDAN: Great question.

That certainly does -- that's one of the big issues that's come up. How we provide services for folks in rural areas, where the resources just may not be there necessarily. We may not have an RCD in those offices. We may not have -- there's various issues that come up.

And so one of my roles is of course to train and work with staff and help provide us to be able to improve our services.

As an example, next Monday I'll be out in Yakima and I'll be working with that office specifically to train them, work with them because they don't have an RCD there. And somebody said, Hey, Steve, what do we do? Somebody who's deaf walks into our office, how are we supposed to provide appropriate services?

So that's one way, I'm going out there directly working with them. I'm also recruiting some of our friends from the Yakima community, we're going to be out there in Yakima on Monday. And I'll be bringing them in to help connect the DVR staff with the community advocate from the deafness center there. So that way when I'm gone and I'm back in Olympia and problems may come up, they have already made that connection with the local resources there.

And so part of your question said well, how can I do that alone?

That's why I'm trying to recruit and bring in as much help as I can from our partners, the people we work with be it the schools, be it with the deafness centers, be it with whatever resources we can find out there.

I'm open to any ideas of how we can improve that because, you know, this is -- as I mentioned before, the position's evolving and how we're doing this and evolving. So I'm really open-minded for how we can improve those situations for the rural offices.

And it is, it's a hot topic. It's something that we talk about often, and we're looking to improve it as best we can.

So hopefully if I can get the opportunity maybe I can recruit David and he can go cover part of the rural area and I can cover the other part. I doubt that will happen any time soon.

But I appreciate your feedback, and I hope that as we talk about that and we discuss what's going on with these rural counties, what can we do to improve these services that that dialog is going to help me improve the services for the folks that we serve out there.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Good afternoon. My name is MICHAEL [ROCK], and I work in Tacoma and work at Mount Tahoma with the deaf kids there.

We are fortunate to have a young lady by the name of Karen Burke who is a DVR representative in the area. Her primary office is in Pierce County over in the Puyallup area.

Since this is an evolving organization and because there are these stimulus dollars to go forth, I as a classroom teacher, who by federal and state law require that DVR representative be there at the IEP meeting, starting at the junior and senior year, I would ask that DVR look at hiring more counselors that are deaf or hard of hearing and/or can sign proficiently so that we may have direct conversation with kids.

Kids in the public school systems and kids at state school often may access services through the use of an interpreter but are not very proficient at it because they have not acquired all of the skills necessary to make that happen correctly.

So that comes back to direct communication between two people, which means that both people need to know how to sign. And so I would encourage this organization to look for an opportunity to hire more counselors. Because when I e-mail Karen Burke three months in advance she says, Let me check my calendar, sorry, I can't do it, I'm already booked.

Holy cow. So yeah, there it is.

STEPHEN ROLDAN: If I could add on to that really fast.

That's part of the state model plan that Kelly showed you. It's very big. A big, big model plan.

And one of focuses on that is to be able to have staff who can serve that population most effectively, and that, of course, being folks who can sign

fluently with folks who are deaf, who understand and have and open mind towards deaf culture.

That's something we're working on but as you've heard Lynnae talk about, with our budget situation right now -- and you heard other people talk about it -- we're doing the best that we can. We're doing the best that we can and want to be able to continue to improve.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I am BARBARA HATHAWAY. I'm Washington State Independent Living Council as an ex officio -- or executive assistant.

And I have a question maybe for Kelly in regards to the outcome on the PowerPoint that you had just shown.

I know that you had a percentage that deaf get jobs and percentage of placement for hard of hearing. And I was looking at that and I was wondering, what's the breakdown of placement on state jobs, community jobs, what's the percentage within that, how many deaf and hard of hearing are working for the state?

Because I've been asking for quite a while deaf and hard of hearing people, and people that have been working for the state for more than eight years don't see any new employees. So what's happening with that situation? What's the plan to get people with disabilities back to state jobs?

LYNNAE RUTTLEGE: Well, Barbara, that's a great question.

We can identify in our database -- for everyone who's been served by voc rehab and then placed in jobs, we can tell what kind of jobs they got. We know where they worked and how much money they made when they were placed, and we know their hours. So we can get that breakdown and good information to share with the community about the kinds of jobs that we're able to help people get.

But I think core to your question is, what are we doing collectively to increase employment of people with disability, especially people who are deaf, into state jobs? And I don't think we're doing nearly enough.

I think that there are a couple of issues. One is that DSHS is probably one of the state agencies that does the most hiring of people with disabilities, and they have huge, huge budget issues. They are not hiring a lot of new people.

But I think there's now some hope in the secretary of the Department of Social and Health Services, Susan Dreyfuss, and the new chief of staff for the governor whose name is Jay Manning, they both are very committed to looking for ways to increase employment of people with disabilities in state government.

They want to increase supportive employment in state government, but they want to increase employment, competitive employment for people with disabilities.

So I would say just keep the pressure on. Keep asking those questions. Those are the right questions to ask. And especially as we come out of recession, make sure that we're asking, so how many people with disabilities are getting jobs? And what kind of jobs are those?

And you collectively in this room have to help us get more applicants, more people with disabilities who have the qualifications, the background, the skills, the passion to work in state government and encourage them to come work for state government. Encourage them to come to VR for services or participate in internships, find ways to do work-study programs, get connected to state government more because that's how people get jobs.

And so but I appreciate your question, thank you.

Other questions or comments? I don't know, David.

DAVE HANKINSON: In answer to your question a little bit more specifically is we did hire one staff that is deaf or late deafened in the Tacoma office.

We just hired them last week. So we are working on improving our efforts to recruit and hire good qualified people: deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind. And Steve is also working on that.

We recognize in the past that we had -- DSHS's hiring system is not very accessible, not very effective and that's e-recruiting, and I'm happy to say that that will soon go away.

Right, Lynnae? That's going away?

LYNNAE RUTTLEGE: Correct.

DAVE HANKINSON: Yes. And it will get better. So we are working hard on that. Thank you.

LYNNAE RUTTLEGE: We also had a real difficult time.

We've been recruiting to hire a voc rehab counselor in our Ellensburg office, and we searched and searched and searched for a voc rehab counselor who was a person who was fluent in sign language and was ASL and native deaf, and could not find an applicant.

So I would really encourage you, if you know of people who are good candidates for voc rehab or other positions in state government, encourage them to apply.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: ROB ROTH. I just wanted to add to my previous comments.

It may already be part of a state model plan about having more collaboration or partnership with high schools and DVR to have a transition plan from high schools to college.

Washington state isn't alone, it's all over the nation. We have students who graduate from high school but they are not ready to be in college. And I don't mean -- they are smart kids but they are out from under their parents' control and don't know what to do with themselves. They don't have good study skills, they don't have a whole panoply of things which we work on during the summer academy.

But I really would like to see that happen on a statewide basis with DVR and the high schools as well, getting the kids ready for college appropriately.

LYNNAE RUTTLEGE: Thank you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Hi. My name is JOAN FOURCHET.

And my concern is, you know, David had talked about some kids, some deaf students, like they go into a two- or four-year community college or university and they -- the money is spent on CART or interpreting or whatever.

Why don't you also encourage them, go to a deaf university? You know, Gallaudet or C-SUN -- you're all eeking over the cost. But if you're thinking about what's going to be cheaper in the long run -- sending them to a deaf university that already has signing instructors and the potential for them to succeed because they are with their peers, or a hearing university where, yeah, they are with their peers but there's a struggle with communication.

And some deaf students, whether DVR doesn't support them a lot or whether it be half and half, and but there's a struggle. They don't have the money to get through things and then they quit. And they'll say I didn't have the money so then they are dependent on SSI.

But, you know, it's not encouraging them or putting them in a place to feel supported. You have to think about what's going to happen in the long run, how to resolve those problems before that.

STEPHEN ROLDAN: That's a good point. Thank you for that question; comment as well.

It's an issue that we've talked about as a group, our RCD group. Where do we draw that line in terms of support? Do we focus on something that's in-state, use accommodations? Do we go for something out of state, Gallaudet or C-SUN, other schools that are more deaf-friendly or deaf down there, or maybe they can receive instruction directly in ASL?

The answer to that question is really -- it's based on individual need. It's individual need and what they are going to require to be able to overcome their barriers to employment related to their vocational goal.

So I really can't give you a solid, you know, answer for each and every possible situation because that's the beauty of what DVR's all about. DVR is

about being able to tailor to these plans. When folks come in the door we don't just treat it as a cookie cutter situation and say, Okay, you're deaf, off you go to Gallaudet. Or we're going to stick you here in state because that program is here specific for that education major.

For example, a lot of people want to go to the University of Washington to become a teacher. Well, does that mean that everybody who wants to become a teacher should go to the University of Washington? Does that mean that every deaf person who wants to become a teacher should go to Gallaudet?

These are the things that we look at when the counselors, the RCDs sit down with each and every person who comes in and figures out okay, what's going on, what kind of barriers are you facing, what is your situation, and how can we help you overcome those barriers so you can be as successful as you can in reaching your potential.

So in answer for your question about can we support more people going to Gallaudet and out of state schools, it comes down to again what are we looking at with the individual when they come into our office, and what can we do to best help then attain their goals.

So it's a sticky question, I realize that. And we're debating it on and on with our RCD groups off and on through e-mail, and I see it come up now and again, what do we do for this situation or that situation? So it's an ongoing debate for our group.

But the bottom line is, again, we want to make sure we meet the individuals' needs as they come to our offices and give them the best possible solution.

And of course most bang for our buck, we want to make sure that they work. And not get into situations where they feel pressured go on with this program, or maybe quit because they are so frustrated.

These are the things the counselors need to dig out and create with the discussions with the students about going to college and getting support.

LYNNAE RUTTLEGE: One more question, it's 3:00.

STEPHEN ROLDAN: Okay, we have one more question.

All right. I see Mr. Leon Curtis -- do you have a question for us?

LEON CURTIS: Good afternoon. I know it's nearly time to end, but I do have a question to ask.

During Mildred Johnson's time in DVR they had a good advisory committee, a strong committee that got together from community members that communicated between the community and DVR.

What happened to the advisory committee? I know it was disbanded because of lack of funding and support, but is it perhaps possible to reestablish that so that VR can reconnect with the deaf community?

STEPHEN ROLDAN: Well, this is related to one of the things that when we first set off and sat down with David and said, well, how are we going to make this job work.

One of the things we agreed on is reconnecting with the community, and we set off to do some forums.

One of the first things we did statewide was -- some of you remember participating in the forums two years ago, trying to connect with the deaf community, hard of hearing community, everybody.

That's one of the things we are continually trying to improve on. We want to make sure that -- you've heard it often this afternoon, we've had this disconnect because of OOS, the waiting list.

We recognize that has really impacted people's attitudes and how they perceive DVR, and it still continues to impact people today.

For example, I went to a deaf expo here in -- it was in Seattle last year. And I would say about 85 percent of the people that I spoke with at that time said, Oh, no, no, I don't want to apply for DVR services because I don't want to be stuck with that waiting list.

And I said, No, no, no, there is no more waiting list, come on down. I was surprised to see the reaction on people's faces. Really? Is DVR open? I can come down and apply now?

One fellow even called a friend of his on the spot. His friend even moved to Arizona because of the wait list. He called him up and said, Hey, DVR's open for business now, c'mon back. And he moved back, he came back and applied for services.

So it's good things like that, getting the word out, little by little. Working with you, again, as I said before, we cannot do this alone. This is going to require partnership.

When you look at that partnership, that sign right there, that indicates two parties (gesturing). It can't be just a one-party effort. We need to work together in creating that communication, getting feedback from you in how we can better improve those connections.

So we're looking for help from you in providing that feedback so we can continually improve those services. So, please, anything you can give us, we're open to it, let us know.

Lynnae?

LYNNAE RUTTLEGE: Have them fill out the evaluations.

STEPHEN ROLDAN: We're out of time for today.

If any of you have any questions about services, want to connect with us, we're still here and we'd be happy to talk to with you afterwards.

We wish you a very safe trip home. Thank you very much.

(Symposium concluded at 3:02 p.m.)