



2012

Annual Report

Prepared for:

Christine O. Gregoire
Governor

and

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Services Administration

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Dear Deputy Commissioner Anthony and Governor Gregoire,

As the Chair of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council, it is my pleasure to submit this report of our activities in 2012 for your review.

A volunteer organization needs two things to be successful; a clear, purposeful, customer centered mission and engaged, dedicated, unselfish volunteers. For the organization to excel it also needs a knowledgeable and passionate staff. The WSRC has both. Working with the leadership and staff of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation the council has continued, (as documented in this report) to make progress in expanding employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Given the accomplishments made on behalf of people with disabilities in 2012, and a gradually improving economy the outlook for continued progress in 2013 is encouraging. There is one great threat to this progress however - uncertainty.

Uncertainty with the direction of the economy (at this writing the "fiscal cliff" issue is yet unresolved) and uncertainty with regard to leadership. DVR has been functioning with an interim director since February of 2010. While the current leadership has done a good job of maintaining the level of service in the face of numerous budget cuts and staffing changes in the past 22 months, addressing the challenges in the future will require a permanent director with the full confidence of the Secretary of the Department of Social and Health Services, DVR staff and most importantly, DVR customers.

In spite of whatever challenges may arise in the future, I continue to believe that motivated DVR customers with the proper training, skills, and opportunity can defeat the barriers created by disabilities. I am also confident that the employers of Washington State will not hesitate to utilize the talent, dedication, and innovation of people with disabilities to succeed in an increasingly competitive global economy.

Respectfully submitted,

chair, Washington State Rehabilitation Council

PART ONE: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report, which is required by Title 1, Section 105 (c) (5) of the Rehabilitation Act, details how the Washington State Rehabilitation Council (WSRC) has carried out the statutory responsibilities in its partnership with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR, which is Washington State's General Vocational Rehabilitation program) in 2012. Our nation's vocational rehabilitation service system is a good investment. According to a report issued by the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation issued earlier this year titled *The Public Vocational Rehabilitation Program: Employing the Talent of Individuals with disabilities in America's Workplace*, "[Nationally customers of vocational rehabilitation who] went to work, together earned about 3.1 billion in wages in their first year of work and paid a little over 1 billion in federal, state and local taxes. They will pay back the cost of their VR services in two to four years. A portion of VR consumers are Social Security Disability beneficiaries with significant disabilities. According to the Social Security Administration, VR's assistance to these SSA recipients will result in a projected lifetime SSA recoupment rate of \$7.00 to every \$1.00 reimbursed to VR."

DVR has contributed to that return on investment. In Federal Fiscal Year 2012, roughly 12,000 thousand Washingtonians were determined eligible for DVR services. Approximately 5,500 progressed to the point of developing an individual plan for employment. DVR succeeded at supporting 2,784 people to become employed within the reporting period. More than 98 percent of those who went to work earned competitive wages (minimum wage or better.) Of those who became employed nearly 62 percent reported that wages they earned were their primary source of support compared to when they applied for services. According to the council's own customer satisfaction survey project, which was completed in 2012, 80.6 percent of survey respondents confirmed that they were better off economically after receiving services from DVR.

In 2012, the Washington State Rehabilitation Council has had a constructive, transparent relationship with DVR. We appreciate the good faith and trust Andres Aguirre, DVR's interim director, has placed in our partnership. The council has focused much of its attention on gathering and understanding feedback from those who received services from DVR. We invited 5,307 DVR customers to our forums. Three and a half percent of those invited took the time to offer us input. We had greater success garnering a response to the customer satisfaction survey than to the customer forum invitations. The survey response rate was 88.4 percent. This year we issued our final report on the survey project and made recommendations to DVR based on what we learned.

DVR performed well on federal performance standards and indicators despite a tough set of practical and operational circumstances in 2012. Between 50 and 60 percent of those served by DVR have psychiatric disabilities. That percentage includes people who disclose a psychiatric disability as a primary, secondary, or tertiary experience of disability. Access to community - based mental health services and supports are an essential comparable benefit, needed to assist the majority of DVR's customers to secure and retain work. Unfortunately such services are in short supply.

There is ample evidence that those with serious mental illness can secure and retain employment when they have access to social supports, reliable medical care and individualized, strength-based treatment plans. Those key services, which have been extremely limited in

Washington State, are now unavailable to most people who need them. DVR is not designed to be a mental health system. Beyond the specific feedback we received about vocational rehabilitation services this year, the top unmet need reported by those who provided comment to us, was for services to support their mental health. This is a failure of policy and leadership that must be addressed. People with psychiatric disabilities are rarely dangerous. Studies show that they are more likely to experience crime than to commit it. Criminalizing behavior that stems from an unaddressed medical need helps no one. The sad fact is that the jails and prisons across the state provide more mental health treatment than most people can access when they are not incarcerated. Washington is not unique in this regard. The Washington State Rehabilitation Council advocates for greater investment in community-based mental health services and supports.

DVR exceeded expectations on five of seven federal performance standards and indicators. This was achieved despite successive budget cuts, short staffing, and operating for three years without the appointment of a permanent director. The council is concerned about developments in the relationship between the designated state agency, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) and the designated state unit, DVR. Inaction regarding appointing a permanent director has fostered uncertainty for too long. DVR needs the authority that comes with permanent leadership, not for its own sake, but so that it is well positioned to preserve its capacity to serve all eligible job seekers with disabilities.

Although DVR has met maintenance of effort ([MOE], the amount of money required to avoid reduced access to federal funds for vocational rehabilitation in our state) in 2012, the council is troubled by recent developments. Governor Gregoire released her proposed 2013-2015 biennial budget on December 18, 2012. Within that proposal she advocates for DVR to receive the amount of General Funds State that will allow it to maintain the same spending level it had during the previous budget period. This is \$3.1 million less than what is needed to meet MOE. Unless the funds are provided in the final budget, the US Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Administration would require DVR to return \$11.6 million in federal grant funds. In addition to returning federal grant dollars DVR would also risk incurring a penalty of \$3.1 million if a MOE waiver is not approved. The council is deeply concerned about the impact this loss of funds could have in the lives of Washingtonians with disabilities. Governor Gregoire and Governor Elect Inslee agree that increasing employment among Washingtonians is a high priority. We urge decision makers to take actions to assure that Washington job seekers with disabilities are not forgotten as strategies are developed to increase opportunities for employment.

The Governor-appointed volunteers who serve on the Washington State Rehabilitation Council have done a remarkable job paying attention to what is really at stake for those served by DVR this year. At a time of uncertainty in our state, we continue to advocate for the notion that Washingtonians with disabilities are capable of achieving a great deal, including career and economic advancement. Policy discussions involving disability in our state are frequently limited to a narrow perception of what constitutes health and safety. Sadly, for some, the resources provided to support health and safety do not address their needs. The Washington State Rehabilitation Council believes that health and safety are essential. Those are expectations we should start with, not aspire to. Our common focus should be on advancing equality. Washingtonians with disabilities expect nothing less.

PART TWO: BACKGROUND

A Partnership Based on Common Goals

Within the Rehabilitation Act there are three vocational rehabilitation programs established: General Rehabilitation programs (our policy partner which operates under the name of the Washington State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation [DVR] in our state. DVR serves eligible jobseekers with various disabilities); rehabilitation programs serving people with low vision and blindness; and Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation programs (which are administered by sovereign tribal nations within the US.) The Washington State Rehabilitation Council (WSRC) and DVR have a partnership built on two common goals:

1. We want more Washingtonians with disabilities to be employed; and,
2. We want DVR to provide effective, equitable services in a timely manner.

Title 1, Section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act defines the responsibilities of the WSRC and DVR to our partnership. The WSRC's collaboration is with the General Vocational Rehabilitation program in Washington State.

We are producing this report because, according to Title 1, Section 105 (c) (5) of the Rehabilitation Act, the WSRC is responsible for reporting to the Governor, the Acting Rehabilitation Services Administration Commissioner, and the public on the work completed in service of this policy partnership in 2012.

The Establishment of State Rehabilitation Councils

Many advocates over decades have worked to highlight and resolve issues that contribute to disproportionately high unemployment of people with disabilities. The current policy partnership between the WSRC and DVR is the direct result of effective advocacy by people with disabilities at a national level who have been long committed to the success of the publicly funded vocational rehabilitation program.

That commitment was most evident when a cross-section of advocates for disability rights mobilized to support the passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act was the first disability civil rights law to be enacted in the United States. The victory was diminished when the Department of Health, Education and Welfare delayed issuing the enacting regulations needed to implement the law.

By April of 1977, frustration mounted and disability-rights advocates took direct action by leading sit-ins in Washington, DC, New York, and San Francisco to pressure Health, Education and Welfare to issue the regulations. While the protests in Washington, DC and New York were short lived, advocates in San Francisco persisted. They occupied the offices of Health, Education and Welfare for four weeks. As a consequence Joseph Califano, the Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, endorsed the regulations. The Rehabilitation Act is the federal law that establishes the publicly funded vocational rehabilitation program as we know it today.

The advocacy did not end in 1977. Since that time disability-rights advocates have continued to work in service of a system that affords customers of the Vocational Rehabilitation program to be more engaged in creating a plan to be employed. During the reauthorization process of the Rehabilitation Act in 1993, advocates built on their tradition of effectiveness. They persuaded Congress to create State Rehabilitation Councils (under Title 1, Section 105) as a mechanism to support people with disabilities receiving vocational rehabilitation services to take an active role in shaping those services.

The Washington State Rehabilitation Council

The Washington State Rehabilitation Council (WSRC) was established in 1994 by Executive Order 04-04. The WSRC is a 16-member, Governor-appointed board of volunteers. Our members represent stakeholder groups including individuals with disabilities who are current or former customers of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation; representatives of business, industry, and labor; a representative of the Client Assistance Program; Division of Vocational Rehabilitation staff; representatives of disability advocacy groups; parent education organizations; and partners from Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation programs. We also have members representing the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the State Independent Living Council.

The mission and vision that guide our policy partnership are:

Mission

To support all individuals with disabilities to receive culturally competent vocational rehabilitation services which support their realization of power and pride and exceed their expectations.

Vision

The Washington State Rehabilitation Council honors the unique, collective and diverse voices of individuals with disabilities to support the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and its customers to achieve employment outcomes by providing guidance, direction and recommendations to increase the quality and availability of vocational rehabilitation services.

The Functions of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council

To achieve our mission and to advance the likelihood that our vision will be realized, the WSRC undertakes specific functions defined in the Rehabilitation Act under Title 1, Section 105 (c) (1-8) including:

- Eliciting feedback from current customers of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to assess and analyze satisfaction with vocational rehabilitation services;
- Advocating for actions to improve service delivery for customers of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation;
- Providing advice, guidance, and recommendations to the Department of Social and Health Services on matters impacting the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's capacity to serve customers in a manner that aligns with the Rehabilitation Act;
- Contributing to the development of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's State Plan (a document required under federal law by the Rehabilitation Services Administration to identify the goals and priorities guiding service delivery for a three-year period) and tracking its implementation;
- Analyzing program and performance data to assess the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's performance on federal performance standards and indicators; and,

- Collaborating with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to develop and conduct comprehensive needs assessments and surveys of customer satisfaction.

Council Operations

Council Structure

Tasks associated with achieving council functions are distributed to five committees. Those committees are:

- Executive;
- Customer Satisfaction and Program Evaluation;
- Employer and Rehabilitation Partnerships;
- Member Participation and Recruitment; and,
- Planning, Policy and Advocacy.

Below are the tasks committees undertake:

Executive Committee- leads strategic planning, proposes a resource plan for negotiation with DVR, establishes council agendas, assures that council projects are finished on time and within budget, and provides guidance and direction for the WSRC's executive director. The council chair leads the Executive Committee and affirms that each committee chair is making progress on work plan goals.

Customer Satisfaction and Program Evaluation Committee- sponsors quarterly customer forums, summarizes feedback from those forums for DVR leadership, reviews and discusses DVR program and performance data, receives information about fair hearings, and conducts and analyzes surveys and assessments to better understand the needs and perspectives of those receiving services from DVR.

Employer and Rehabilitation Partnerships Committee- considers DVR's relationship with and visibility among the community of employers and encourages strategic engagement with other partners in rehabilitation named in the Rehabilitation Act.

Member Participation and Recruitment Committee- conducts surveys of council members, gauges emerging member needs, assures that member input is driving the council work, recruits and orients new members.

Planning, Policy and Advocacy Committee- drafts the WSRC contribution to the State Plan required by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, co-sponsors public forums to receive public input on the State Plan when it is in draft form, analyzes and comments on proposed changes to state or federal laws which may impact DVR's approach to or capacity for serving its customers.

Each January committees develop work plans. The plans identify the tasks they will complete during the year. The council then assigns who will take the lead on a task, and assigns a timeline for completing the work.

Resources

Members: The Most Important Council Resource

The skill and dedication of our members determine the council's success. Fifteen members served on our council in 2012. The Rehabilitation Act requires that more than half of our council members are people with disabilities. Most of our members who have disabilities have, at one point or another, utilized vocational

rehabilitation services in Washington State or another state. A candidate for membership must meet the criteria for the position he or she is seeking. Membership criteria are specified under Title 1, Section 105 (2)(b)(i-xi) of the Rehabilitation Act. Following are brief profiles of those who served on the council in 2012:

Jeffry Abe-Gunter, of Spokane, *representing labor*

Jeff has served on the WSRC since spring of 2004. He brings a mix of passion and pragmatism to his service with the council. His active listening skills and approachable manner, make him stand out as a leader who brings together people with divergent points of view. In his professional life, Jeff works as a case resource manager for the Division of Developmental Disabilities in Spokane. His practical knowledge of the Developmental Disabilities service system, and his knowledge of collective bargaining, are also assets to the council.

Andres Aguirre, of Olympia, *representing the DVR Administration (ex-officio member)*

Andres has been serving as the interim director of DVR for three years. He continues to distinguish himself as a leader who is open to dialogue and input from others. Andres has been fair with the council and is easy going. He is the first director of DVR to give the council regularly scheduled time on the agenda of the Senior Leadership Team (the top decision makers within DVR) for the WSRC. Andres worked as a vocational rehabilitation counselor, unit supervisor, and program manager in the state office before serving as the director of the organization. In 2004, he served in Iraq as a member of the National Guard.

Valerie Arnold, of Elma, *representing the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)*

Valerie has a long interest and commitment to education. She worked as a teacher for many years before bringing her talents to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. In 2012 Valerie completed her first term of service and has developed an impressive familiarity with how vocational rehabilitation works. Valerie devotes her professional efforts to special education policy. Her strengths on our council include drawing attention to what is at the heart of spirited discussions.

Don Brandon, of Mountlake Terrace, *representing business and industry*

Don is the director of the Northwest ADA Center. He served as the council's vice chair in 2012. Don brings a breadth and depth of knowledge about supporting successful reasonable accommodation for workers with disabilities and their employers. He supports his council colleagues to consider an employer's perspective on vocational rehabilitation and often brings questions that would otherwise not be considered in council deliberations.

Charity Marie Drummond, of Seattle, *representing the State Independent Living Council*

Charity is an independent living coordinator at the Alliance of People with Disabilities, a Seattle-based center for independent living. Charity completed her first year of council service in 2012. Charity excels at helping people locate resources to meet unaddressed needs. Outside of council work Charity is a family-oriented person. She earned a Master's degree in Christian Counseling.

Jana Finkbonner, of Bellingham, *representing Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation*

Jana works as the director of the North Intertribal Vocational Rehabilitation Program. She is an enrolled member of the Lummi Nation. Jana is a doer. She is well respected by our council and by her peers nationally who awarded her the honor of tribal vocational rehabilitation director of the year.

Vickie Foster, of Seattle, *representing current or former customers of vocational rehabilitation*

Vickie is a seasoned volunteer who has given a great deal of time to a range of issues affecting people with disabilities including fair housing, preserving accessible transportation, and medical advocacy. In addition to serving on our council she is also appointed to the City of Seattle Disabilities Commission. She is deliberative and listens before weighing in with her own down-to-earth perspective.

Rudy Hernandez, of Burien, *representing Vocational Rehabilitation Professionals currently working in the field*

Rudy has worked in the field of vocational rehabilitation for more than 17 years. He supervises the DVR office in SeaTac. Prior to focusing on employment for people with disabilities, Rudy worked as a social worker specializing in geriatrics. He served older Latinos. Rudy is also a Vietnam veteran.

Mike Hudson, of Bellingham, *representing business and industry*

Mike was elected by his council peers to serve as our chair in 2012 for his second term. Outside of his council leadership, Mike works for the Association of Washington Business, which is our state's chamber of commerce. He has a leadership role with the AWB Institute, an arm of the organization that focuses on workforce development policy and partnerships. Mike is an action-oriented person; he cares whether or not the vocational rehabilitation system works, because he wants the people it serves to achieve their potential as they define it. Mike has an extensive background in marketing and working with credit unions. He served in the National Guard for 17 years.

Jerry Johnsen, of Seattle, *representing the Client Assistance Program*

Jerry has worked as the director of the Client Assistance Program for 33 years. His breadth and depth of experience with the vocational rehabilitation system in Washington State is helpful to his colleagues as the council works to put the issues we learn about in context. Washington is fortunate to have an independent Client Assistance Program. Jerry is a passionate advocate who cares deeply about assuring that those serving DVR customers understand the relationship between the Rehabilitation Act and the way services are delivered. Outside of his council work and work with the Client Assistance Program, Jerry is an avid cyclist and photographer and has many other civic commitments.

Susan Kautzman, of Prosser, *representing providers of community rehabilitation services*

Susan is inclined to think first about what people and systems can do. She works for a community rehabilitation program (CRP) called EnTrust Community Services. She has a longtime commitment to supporting people with developmental disabilities to navigate service systems. Her depth of knowledge about vocational rehabilitation mixed with her practical streak is a powerful tool for the council because when we are deliberating, she can help us move from the philosophical aim of a recommendation to a useful implementation strategy. Susan chaired the council's Planning, Policy, and Advocacy Committee in 2012.

Jim Larson, of Olympia, *representing business and industry*

Jim Larson is the President and CEO of Morningside, a community rehabilitation program (CRP). Morningside was recognized in 2012 as the best CRP in the nation. For 39 years Jim has been working to increase employment for Washingtonians with developmental disabilities. He first served on the WSRC from 1994 to 2000. After stepping away for seven years, Jim rejoined our ranks in 2008. In 2012, he served as the chair of the Employer and Rehabilitation Partnerships Committee.

Vanessa Lewis, of Tacoma, *representing Washington PAVE, our state's parent education organization*

Vanessa enjoys listening to customers who attended the quarterly forums and demonstrated a particular talent for drawing out those who might have otherwise gone unnoticed. As a seasoned systems advocate with expertise in helping families of school-age children with disabilities developing Individual Education Plans, Vanessa is uniquely equipped to help the council consider the challenges which transition-age students face in going to work.

Martin McCallum, of Olympia, *representing the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board*

Martin has served on the WSRC since spring of 2004. He served as our council chair in 2008. He has always been an active leader chairing a subcommittee. In 2011, Martin chaired the Customer Satisfaction and Program Evaluation Committee. Under his leadership the committee designed and managed a major project surveying DVR customer satisfaction. Martin has worked in the field of workforce development for more than three decades and is a true civil servant. His great attention to detail and ability to understand how work products will be received by the public and state leadership is invaluable.

Leandro Razo, of Grandview, *representing current or former customers of vocational rehabilitation*

Leandro served his second year as a council member in 2012. He served on the Customer Satisfaction and Program Evaluation Committee where he weighed in offering thoughts about the customer satisfaction survey project. In addition to bringing the perspective of someone who has received vocational rehabilitation services, Leandro understands service delivery because he studied Human Services at Eastern Washington University.

Council Staff

Joelle Brouner, executive director

Joelle has served as the council's executive director since 2005. She has a Master's degree in public administration. Joelle was served by DVR from 1992-1994.

JoAnne Lang, executive assistant

JoAnne has served as the council's executive assistant since 2007. This year she completed her Associates of Arts degree from South Puget Sound Community College and has gone on to study at Saint Martin's University.

Gubernatorial Appointments and Reappointments Received in 2012

Governor Gregoire assured that the council's partnership with DVR will remain strong by providing us with our most essential resource, excellent members. On September 27, 2012, she acted by appointing two new members to the council. Philip Bradford, of Tacoma, was appointed to represent labor. Mr. Bradford is an active member of SEIU Healthcare Local 775 Northwest where he has served as an executive board member. He also brings a wealth of experience with people with disabilities. Mr. Bradford has provided in-home residential supports and currently works in the employment arena as a job skills trainer for Goodwill of Tacoma. He is also an elected board advisor to Self-Advocates of Washington. Governor Gregoire also appointed Beth Meyer, of Shelton, to the council. Ms. Meyer will represent the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board, where she works as a grants and programs manager. She brings a range of professional and volunteer experience, which aligns with our mission. Ms. Meyer provided in-home residential support for people with autism for 10 years and staffed a project to assist at-risk youth to find work in the building trades. She has also volunteered to support survivors of domestic violence.

Governor Gregoire reappointed five current members to serve additional terms. We are pleased that our current council chair Mike Hudson, of Bellingham, will continue serving. Valerie Arnold, of Elma, will continue to represent the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Vickie Foster, of Seattle, was reappointed to a second term representing current or former customers of DVR. Susan Kautzman, of Prosser, will continue to represent the perspective of community rehabilitation programs on the council. Vanessa Lewis, of Tacoma, will continue representing Washington PAVE on our council. The council appreciates the ongoing commitment and expertise of these dedicated volunteers.

Celebrating two of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council's Best

Jeff Abe-Gunter of Spokane, who represented Labor, and Martin McCallum of Olympia, who represented the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board on the WSRC, concluded eight years of volunteer service at our October council meeting. Abe-Gunter and McCallum were the last of the slate of members who were appointed in the spring of 2004 to rebuild the council. It is difficult to overstate how much each contributed to the council during his tenure.

Jeff Abe-Gunter is a case resource manager for the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) in Spokane. He serves a caseload of young people and their families. Because he served as a shop steward for the Federation of Washington State Employees he brought two valuable bases of experience to his council membership. Through Jeff's leadership his council colleagues and DVR leaders came to understand more about how to effectively collaborate with DDD in service of DVR's common customers. Abe-Gunter distinguished himself as an engaged member with a great sense of humor, the ability to speak his mind respectfully, and for big heartedness. He was the chair of the Customer Satisfaction and Program Evaluation Committee for a time.

Martin McCallum has dedicated his career to civil service and more specifically to workforce development. He was the council's chair in 2008 and served as a committee chair every year since his appointment. Martin gained a reputation for being knowledgeable and thorough. He is just as kind and thoughtful as he is knowledgeable. Martin's ability to negotiate bureaucracy and to refine council draft correspondence and the State Plan strengthened our final products.

Beyond individual contributions, Jeff Abe-Gunter and Martin McCallum helped establish a productive, positive tone for those who succeed them.

Other Resources

Council operations are funded by taxes collected from state and federal taxpayers. The funds are allocated for DVR's use then, as required by Title I, Section 105 (d) 1 of the Rehabilitation Act, which states,

"The Council shall prepare, in conjunction with the designated State unit, a plan for the provision of such resources, including such staff and other personnel, as may be necessary and sufficient to carry out the functions of the Council under this section. The resource plan shall, to the maximum extent possible, rely on the use of resources in existence during the period of implementation of the plan."

The WSRC Executive Committee prepares a proposed resource plan and enters into negotiation with DVR to secure those resources. In September of 2011, the council presented our proposal for a resource plan of \$204,000 in a meeting that included Andres Aguirre, interim director of DVR; Joelle Brouner, WSRC executive director; Lorie Christoferson, business services manager of DVR and, Mike Hudson, council chair. The proposal (for the same amount requested for the third consecutive year) was approved. We appreciate our DVR partners for their good faith approach to the resource plan negotiation.

PART THREE: ACHIEVEMENT OF FEDERAL MANDATES BY THE WASHINGTON STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL IN 2012

Council Meetings

Title 1, Section 105 (4) (f) requires that the Washington State Rehabilitation Council meet at least four times a year. It says,

“The Council shall convene at least 4 meetings a year in such places as it determines to be necessary to conduct Council business and conduct such forums or hearings as the Council considers appropriate. The meetings, hearings, and forums shall be publicly announced. The meetings shall be open and accessible to the general public unless there is a valid reason for an executive session.”

The Rehabilitation Act also authorizes a State Rehabilitation Council to pay for the costs of travel, lodging, meals and reasonable accommodations needed to conduct council business. Title 1, Section 105 (4) (g) states,

“The Council may use funds allocated to the Council by the designated State unit under this title (except for funds appropriated to carry out the client assistance program under section 112 and funds reserved pursuant to section 110(c) to carry out part C) to reimburse members of the Council for reasonable and necessary expenses of attending Council meetings and performing Council duties (including child care and personal assistance services), and to pay compensation to a member of the Council, if such member is not employed or must forfeit wages from other employment, for each day the member is engaged in performing the duties of the Council.”

The Washington State Rehabilitation Council met:

- January 26-27, 2012 in Seattle
- April 19-20, 2012 in Wenatchee
- July 19-20, 2012 in Kennewick
- October 18-19, 2012 in Vancouver

Structure of WSRC Meetings

Members of the WSRC meet for two full days each quarter. All council meetings are open to the public, pursuant to the requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act. In general the agenda for the first day focuses on committee work, training or presentations about new information, and a customer forum. The second day includes agency and committee reports, a report from the director of DVR, action items, perspectives from the field, and information related to program performance or council mandates.

Highlights of 2012 Proceedings

January 26-27, 2012 in Seattle

During the first day of the meeting the council reviewed the data collected from the customer satisfaction survey, including the general comments respondents provided.

The council is responsible for understanding DVR's strategic partnerships and advocating for the systemic changes that will increase the likelihood that customers will receive services to address their barriers to employment. For this reason on the second day of the January meeting we chose to focus on an in-depth exploration of the state of affairs for those seeking services from Washington State's mental health system. If

one factors primary, secondary, and tertiary diagnoses, between 50 and 60 percent of those served by DVR face psychiatric disabilities.

The council was joined by Melodie Pazolt. Ms. Pazolt is the Supported Employment and Housing Coordinator for the Department of Behavioral Health and Recovery. She introduced our members to the history of the legislative mandates that led to the creation of regional support networks and helped us understand the structures of those networks and challenges they face. Melodie Pazolt also highlighted best practices regarding employment for people experiencing psychiatric disabilities.

Although people with a range of disabilities in Washington State face serious unmet needs, we can think of no group for whom the scarcity of resources is more severe than those with serious mental illness. The facts reveal a troubling state of affairs:

- Nationally, in the last 15 years there has been a 6 percent increase in the number of people with serious psychiatric disabilities in prison. This increase occurred despite the fact that crime rates have declined nationwide.

National Public Radio, January 27, 2012

- In the fourth quarter of 2010, 10 percent of those receiving services from the Washington State Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery were employed, working an average of 16 hours a week and earning \$12.95 per hour.

Employment Security, LMEA 4th Quarter Report 2010

- “People with serious mental illness die, on average, 25 years earlier than the general population. This is a serious public health problem for the people served by our state mental health systems. While suicide and injury account for 30-40 percent of excess mortality, 60 percent of premature deaths in persons with schizophrenia are due to medical conditions such as cardiovascular, pulmonary and infectious diseases.” These morbidity rates are similar to sub-Saharan Africa’s.

“Morbidity and Mortality in People with Serious Mental Illness” by Barbara Mauer p. 5

These facts point to a sad and unacceptable reality. It does not have to be this way. Outside of the expense in human terms, if Washington State wants to bend the cost curve of Medicaid downward, then making policy decisions that increase the capacity of people with disabilities to participate in the community and to be employed only makes sense. To those who say it is too costly to do so, we respond by saying it is too expensive to do anything less.

Some examples of council work to support better outcomes for DVR customers with psychiatric disabilities include:

- Having ongoing representation of Mike Hudson, the council chair, at meetings of the Mental Health Consortium;
- Providing written comment to the Department of Behavioral Health and Recovery (DBHR) on November 9, 2012 regarding its draft plan titled, “Adult Behavioral Health System—Making the Case for Change”; and,
- Participating in a dialogue on November 30, 2012 with community rehabilitation programs that provide contracted services to customers of both DVR and DBHR in which the role and the work of the council was highlighted.

April 19-20, 2012, in Wenatchee

During the first day of the April council meeting members continued the discussion they started at the January meeting about the meaning of the data collected during the customer satisfaction survey. We worked on crafting survey recommendations.

On the second day of the meeting Martin McCallum, the WSRC's representative from the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board (Workforce Board), provided his council colleagues with an environmental scan of workforce programs in preparation for the High Skills, High Wages plan 2012-2022. This plan is created by the Workforce Board for the state legislature to provide decision makers with the information they need to make strategic investments in workforce development and training. The goal is to position Washington State to have a skilled and capable workforce to meet the needs of employers in new and existing employment sectors for a 10 year period.

The council was also joined in April by Debbie Cook, the interim executive director of the Washington State Independent Living Council (SILC). Ms. Cook discussed that SILC was rebuilding its capacity by recruiting for five new members and a new executive director.

Some examples of council work related to the High Skills, High Wages report and to support the success of the SILC to rebuild its capacity included:

- Providing the Workforce Board with input about social services stakeholders to include in early High Skills, High Wages stakeholder meetings;
- Attending a High Skills, High Wages stakeholder meeting with colleagues affiliated with other Department of Social and Health Services component programs to discuss feedback on priorities proposed in the plan;
- Commenting on the Workforce Board's High Skills, High Wages plan on August 17, 2012;
- Sharing foundational documents and information about WSRC practices with SILC staff; and,
- Disseminating SILC member and staff recruitment information to our council network.

July 19-20, 2012 in Kennewick

At our July meeting council members dedicated time on the agenda for the first day to discuss our overall progress on achieving federal mandates. We also reviewed the status of our member recruitment efforts and considered suggestions for topics to include in our orientation for new members in the months ahead.

On day two of the meeting we heard from Kelly Franklin, the chief of field services for DVR, who demonstrated an online customer self-assessment tool. The tool was developed with the original intent of responding to Washingtonians who had exhausted 99 weeks of unemployment benefits.

Several agencies including DVR came together to learn more about the characteristics of those facing long term unemployment and the loss of benefits. They discovered that many exhausting benefits were older workers. Some of these unemployed people would not be likely to think of themselves as people with disabilities even if they experience serious chronic health conditions. These health issues can be disabling and can create barriers to employment. Experiencing a barrier to employment created by a disabling condition is part of the criteria for being eligible for DVR services.

DVR leaders wanted to address part of the unmet need by providing information to people facing this difficult circumstance. They thought people being served by the Employment Security Department could talk with a staff person there to understand whether DVR might have services to assist them in reentering the workforce. These staffers could access an online tool designed to assist partners in making appropriate referrals.

As the project progressed the political environment changed. Our partners at Employment Security faced a major budget reduction that resulted in laying off roughly 40 percent of their direct service staff. With that, they did not have the staffing levels needed to use the referral tool. DVR decided to revise the tool originally designed for caseworkers to be an online self-assessment tool.

While the WSRC recognized the laudable intent motivating the creation of the online self-assessment tool, we were concerned that negative unintended consequences could result upon its implementation. Once a tool is made available on a website, it is available to everyone. DVR serves people with a range of disabilities, reading levels, and systems knowledge. While some customers possess the skills to understand the tool, others are less equipped to.

Although users of the self-assessment tool are encouraged to contact DVR with questions or for assistance completing the tool itself, some on the council were concerned that the tool could be off-putting or serve to discourage people from applying for services. We are not supportive of actions that have the potential to dissuade someone from applying for services unless the person has had access to information he or she understands and makes an informed choice to go a different direction.

Another council concern about the online self-assessment tool was the possibility that some might confuse it with the application or eligibility determination process. Because some of the questions included in the self-assessment tool are also asked during the application process, we could imagine someone believing they had applied for services when they had not.

The council's Planning, Policy and Advocacy Committee weighed in three times with comments during the development of the tool. Some feedback was reflected in the final product, some was not. During the July meeting members saw the final self-assessment tool live. The response from council members was positive.

Some examples of council work related to DVR's online self-assessment tool:

- Holding a Planning, Policy and Advocacy Committee conference call focusing on the first draft of questions for the self-assessment tool on January 9, 2012;
- Writing a letter on behalf of the council in response to the January 23, 2012 draft questions for the self-assessment tool;
- Attending a meeting including the SRC executive director, the DVR chief of field services, the special assistant to the DVR director and the DVR policy manager on January 25, 2012 to discuss the intent of the customer self-assessment tool and the basis of council concern; and,
- Participating in a dialogue about the customer self-assessment tool at the statewide management team meeting in February 2012.

October 18-19, 2012 in Vancouver

When the council met in Vancouver it voted on the locations of our 2013 meeting locations, we received an update on the status of our request for appointments or reappointments. For the purpose of

management and administration, DVR divides our state into three geographical areas. In October we received an update on program and performance from the Area 3 Manager, Paul Vertrees. For a second time in 2012 the council reviewed caseload sizes in each office. This led to a broader discussion of factors that influence service delivery in the field.

Other key topics addressed during the meeting included the findings from DVR's statewide case review and the potential impacts of sequestration on DVR and Washington State if Congress and the President do not reach agreement by December 31, 2012 to avert indiscriminate budget cuts of 10 percent of federal funding and increased tax rates.

We continue to follow these issues.

Mandate:

Title 1, Section 105, (h) and (f) of the Rehabilitation Act charge the Washington State Rehabilitation Council with garnering feedback from current customers of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation regarding their satisfaction with services they receive.

The Washington State Rehabilitation Council gathered customer feedback in two ways in 2012. We hosted four customer forums across the state, and we analyzed the data collected in our survey of customers conducted late in 2011. This section explores what we learned from those customers.

Customer Forums

In Federal Fiscal Year 2012 the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation served approximately 12 thousand people. That number includes people who applied for service but were not determined to be eligible as well as those who participated in any aspect of the vocational rehabilitation process from eligibility to closure. Well over a third of those served were invited to attend a customer forum organized and sponsored by the WSRC this year.

Purpose

The forum is a regular feature of our meeting. Forums have three purposes, including:

1. Providing an opportunity for DVR customers to offer feedback and to be heard;
2. Allowing council members the opportunity to listen to observations about the vocational rehabilitation process from varied local perspectives; and,
3. Encouraging council members to consider if the comments that arise at one forum align with comments shared at another forum.

Forums are as much an art rather than as a science. There is no substitute for listening to people express successes, frustrations or suggestions for improving the vocational rehabilitation process. The forums are more anecdotal and narrative than any other methodology the council uses to factor customer perspectives in our work.

We want DVR to be a listening bureaucracy. The forum provides an opportunity to incorporate listening to customers in our partnership with DVR on an ongoing basis.

Who is invited specifically?

The council prepares for the forums by creating a notice of public meeting that goes out to customers of DVR with open cases in the county where the quarterly meeting is held. In instances when the meeting is happening in a county with a single office or a small population, the notice may be sent out to customers served by offices in more than one county. Notices are mailed to be received two weeks ahead of the forum date.

In 2012 the WSRC held forums on:

- Thursday January 26, in Seattle;
- Thursday April 19, in Wenatchee;
- Thursday July 19, in Kennewick; and,
- Thursday October 18, in Vancouver.

In addition to being able to provide input about what it is like to receive services from DVR, customers in attendance seeking to address individual case concerns have an opportunity to meet with representatives of the Client Assistance Program and staff of local DVR offices to schedule follow up.

Forum Comments Quantified and Examined

Location	Total Customers Invited Per Location	Total Customers Commenting in Person Per Location	Total Telephone Comments Per Location	Total e-mail Comments Per Location	Total Comments Sent Per Location by Postal Mail
Seattle	3,742	48	68	23	2
Wenatchee	196	1	0	0	0
Kennewick	549	15	8	0	0
Vancouver	820	15	7	1	1
2012 TOTALS FOR ALL FORUM LOCATIONS	5,307	79	83	24	3

This year seven issues were most frequently mentioned by those who provided comment: lack of timely services or communication; confusion about aspects of the rehabilitation process; questions about DVR's consistency of practice; service issues with DVR contractors/rehabilitation partners; limited access to or availability of comparable benefits (particularly community-based mental health services and supports); dissatisfaction with the level of informed choice regarding job placement or employment goal; and appreciation for good service. Statewide, customers expressed two important unmet needs: First and foremost, a lack of access to, or capacity within the mental health system; and second, reduced availability of public transportation as municipalities across the state facing declining revenue have greatly reduced fixed routes and paratransit hours or service areas. Tri-Cities customers and providers were especially vocal about the difficulty those living in surrounding rural areas have securing work without transit.

Beyond the specific feedback the council received, we made some general observations about the customers who attended forums in 2012. The customers who attended most often were either those who experience psychiatric disabilities, or those who are Deaf, late deafened, or hard of hearing. We also recognized increased disclosure of conviction histories. Unfortunately, many customers continue to face poverty, which was reflected by the challenges articulated by those who attended.

What does the council do with the Input?

The council provides a written summary of each forum to DVR's senior leadership team, the three Area Managers, the customer relations manager, and the supervisors of local offices near the forum location. We provided these summaries on:

- February 8,
- July 30 (which incorporated the comment provided by the one person who attended the April forum), and
- October 25.

We also factor what we learn in discussions with the Senior Leadership Team and when we are crafting our feedback on the goals and priorities we believe that DVR ought to include in the State Plan it prepares for the US Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration.

Customer Satisfaction Survey

Following is the executive summary from our final survey report.

"The Washington State Rehabilitation Council conducted a telephone survey of 455 current or former customers (reasonable accommodation was provided for Deaf respondents and those speaking languages other than English) between September and November of 2011. The survey project was led by the Customer Satisfaction and Program Evaluation Committee of the WSRC in collaboration with DVR. The research was conducted by the Research and Data Analysis Unit (RDA) of the Department of Social and Health Services and paid for by DVR. The survey yielded a response rate of 88.4 percent. The margin of error for the survey is +/- 1.67 percent. In 2012 we completed the project by analyzing the collected data, developing recommendations and issuing a final report for DVR's consideration.

Survey Respondents Confirm that DVR Does Many Things Well

- *More than 90 percent of all survey respondents strongly agree or agree that DVR services were provided in a respectful manner.*
- *Between 87.9 percent and 90 percent of survey respondents currently implementing an Individual Plan for Employment strongly agree or agree that their counselors want them to succeed.*
- *Of those respondents who became employed after receiving services from DVR, 74.6 percent are working as many hours as they want to work. 80.6 percent of respondents with closed cases affirmed that they are better off financially than before receiving DVR services.*

Findings that Merit Further Study and/or Action

- *The primary purpose of DVR is to assist jobseekers with disabilities to address barriers to employment. Given that, it is both curious and concerning that regardless of whether a survey respondent is currently*

implementing an Individual Plan for Employment, or has a closed case (with or without employment), 33-39 percent strongly disagree or disagree that DVR has helped them work with disability issues that have prevented them from getting a job.

- *We note that of survey respondents currently implementing an Individual Plan for Employment, those with a plan open for 961 to 1400 days are less certain of their next step than those in plan for 61 to 420 days.*
- *Although we do not know how the survey respondents define the term “skill,” it is notable that between 29.3 percent and 46.4 percent of survey respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that by working with DVR they were learning skills to get and keep a job.*
- *Close to 29 percent of those who became employed after receiving DVR services responded that they had not retained work.*

Recommendations from the Washington State Rehabilitation Council to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Based on Survey Findings

Further Study

We recommend that DVR undertake additional research and analysis to identify the root causes of the survey findings regarding: barriers to employment, skill acquisition, and employment retention after closure.

Addressing Barriers

We recommend that DVR assure that vocational rehabilitation counselors are supported by their supervisors and by administration to take the time to identify and understand the barriers to employment the customer faces.

We recommend that DVR encourage vocational rehabilitation counselors to provide ongoing assessment (particularly for those with plans open for extended periods) to identify the disability-specific services and supports available to address barriers that emerge following plan development.

We recommend that DVR identify strategies and implement practices to improve and enhance the continuity of communication between vocational rehabilitation counselors and customers, particularly during instances of delay or transitions between vendors or case transfers.

Informed Choice

We recommend that DVR place greater emphasis on the customer’s role in the vocational rehabilitation process during intake and orientation. We encourage DVR to reinforce that emphasis over the life of the case.

We recommend that DVR supports their staff providing direct service to strengthen community resource information and referral activities during the life of a plan by developing and updating their knowledge of the resources other than DVR available to customers in local communities.

We recommend that DVR encourage staff providing direct service to clearly delineate sequential steps in the achievement of the Individual Plan for Employment. Then, celebrate or acknowledge movement from one step to the next.

Courtesy and Respect

We recommend that DVR develop and implement strategies for increasing extrinsic demonstrations of the vocational rehabilitation counselor's desire for customer success.

Equity

We recommend that DVR research and analyze case notes and authorizations for payment for formal education and training across each of the three areas to determine if there are variances in interpretations of policies, procedures, and practices. Use what is learned from the analysis to provide guidance and reinforcement of policy. We realize that every customer has individual interests, abilities, and job goals; however, all customers deserve equal access to skill development.

Customers of DVR confirm that the services they receive make a meaningful difference in their lives. No matter what is going well in a system, there is always room for improvement. The WSRC extends our appreciation to RDA for its excellent contribution to our understanding; DVR for its open, collaborative approach to the project; and, every one of the 402 current or former customers of DVR who took the time to respond to our survey."

Final Report, Dialogue and Response

The council issued a final report on the customer satisfaction survey project on June 1, 2012. Mike Hudson, council chair; Martin McCallum, chair of the council's Customer Satisfaction and Program Evaluation Committee; and Joelle Brouner, executive director, met with DVR's senior leadership team on June 25, 2012 to discuss the report and the recommendations. During that meeting the senior leadership team asked for clarification. Some team members did not draw a connection between the story expressed by the data and the recommendations made by the WSRC. By the end of the meeting there was greater understanding.

On August 29, 2012 Andres Aguirre, interim director of DVR provided a written response to Mike Hudson regarding the report. Mr. Aguirre thanked the council for its work on the report and acknowledged that the data collected was valuable. He also appreciated that the council clarified its recommendations. Finally he agreed that DVR would undertake additional research and analysis to identify the root causes of the survey findings regarding: barriers to employment, skill acquisition, and employment retention after closure.

Mandate:

According to the Rehabilitation Act, in Title 1, Section 105, (c)(1)(A) (B) and (C), the Washington State Rehabilitation Council is mandated to analyze program and performance data to assess the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's performance on federal standards and indicators.

The council is responsible for developing a thorough understanding of the vocational rehabilitation process so that it can analyze the factors that influence DVR's program performance. DVR is a complex system. Understanding how it works and identifying what influences its overall performance is the task that takes most of the council's time.

To cultivate this understanding and develop an analysis, our members consider a wide range of data and other information.

Each quarter we review:

- Three director's monthly reports (quantitative information about applications, eligibility determinations, cases eligible for plan for more 120 days, individual plans for employment written, cases closed rehabilitated, rehabilitation rate, and some information about the numbers of cases where the customer is receiving benefits from the Social Security Administration);
- A report that provides an overview of quarterly fair hearing activity; and,
- Progress by DVR on achieving federal performance standards and indicators.

Twice in 2012 we have requested and received reports on the caseload size per counselor in each office. Although the numbers were illuminating, we concluded that without understanding the composition of the caseload and the complexity of the needs of customers who are being served on that caseload (information that falls outside the scope of our role), we could not assess how manageable a caseload was.

Annually we review and discuss what was learned from the statewide case review.

This year we analyzed all the data collected between September and November of 2011 for our customer satisfaction survey.

Our Analysis of the Key Challenges Facing DVR

We recognize that DVR is doing many things well. It has exceeded expectations on five of seven federal performance standards and indicators established by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, by significant margins. It has done so while understaffed and with fewer comparable benefits available to those it serves. These are notable achievements on which we congratulate our partners.

Washington State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's Performance on Federal Standards and Indicators

Federal Fiscal Year starting October 1, 2011 through September 30, 2012

<i>Evaluation Standard (must pass 4 of 7 standards)</i>	<i>Standard</i>	<i>Actual</i>	<i>Pass/Fail</i>
Indicator 1.1- Change in Employment The number of individuals achieving employment outcomes in the current performance period compared with the previous performance period.	2,763	2,784	Pass
Indicator 1.2- Rehab Rate The percentage of individuals receiving services under individual plans for employment who achieve an employment outcome.	55.80%	54.48%	Fail
Indicator 1.3- Competitive Employment Rate Competitive employment outcomes as a percentage of all employment outcomes.	72.60%	98.20%	Pass
Indicator 1.4- Significant Disability Rate Competitive employment outcomes for individuals with significant disabilities as a percentage of all individuals with employment outcomes.	62.40%	97.25%	Pass
Indicator 1.5- Wage Ratio The ratio of average VR hourly wages to the average state hourly wage.	0.520	0.498	Fail
Indicator 1.6- Increase in Self-Support The percentage of individuals achieving Competitive employment outcomes who report their own income as the primary source of support at closure compared to application.	53.00%	61.67%	Pass
Indicator 1.7-Equal Access to Service Standard Access to services for minorities as measured by the ratio of the minority service rate to the non-minority service rate.	.80	.90	Pass

All organizations can improve. Despite what DVR does well, we note three areas of performance where our partner can achieve more success.

In Federal Fiscal Year 2012, DVR's rehabilitation rate was 54.48 percent, below the federal standard. In a positive development, we are pleased to report that as of December 13, 2012, DVR's rehabilitation rate is 56.26 percent. The council applauds this and hopes DVR sustains its momentum in this regard.

Both the statewide case review and the 2011 customer satisfaction survey raise questions about why DVR is not succeeding as much as it has historically at addressing barriers to employment. Neither DVR nor the WSRC attribute this to a single factor. DVR is working to identify the root causes of this issue.

The WSRC would like to see DVR improve its performance regarding the average hourly wage customers earn at closure. We have tracked DVR's performance on this indicator since 2008. Although it has come close it has not passed it during that four year period. While we are heartened to learn that 80.6 percent of those who participated in the customer satisfaction survey confirm they are economically better off after working with DVR than they were before. Supporting customers to achieve greater degrees of economic advancement is a fundamental goal of the Rehabilitation Act. We hope that DVR pays more attention to developing strategies to helping customers gain qualifications for positions with better pay and benefits.

Observations about the Organizational Culture of DVR

Numbers only tell part of the story of any organization. Each organization has a culture. The factors that influence that culture are at least as important to its overall success as the performance indicators it measures. It is challenging for a group of volunteers to truly assess and understand the culture of a state agency. Still, we have noticed issues that have had a deleterious effect on DVR from a practical and cultural standpoint.

In December 2009, Lynnae Rutledge, the DVR director, left Washington to be appointed as the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). The Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) has not appointed a permanent director to replace her in three years. After Rutledge left, other highly skilled people have departed. A certain amount of turnover is expected. The matter of turnover was complicated for a time by a hiring freeze. That has been over for long enough that filling vacancies should no longer be seriously delayed. Some who left direct service positions may have been inspired to do so because they could secure higher pay with the same skills from other agencies. In terms of administrative turnover, within DVR's state office, the departures were mainly in the planning and program evaluation unit.

We believe that the decision not to appoint a permanent director led to a perception within DVR, and the community at large, that DVR's work is not valued. Whatever the cause, this perception has made it more difficult to fill key positions. Filling positions responsible for providing direct service has been somewhat easier than administrative positions. Consequently, DVR has had less in-house capacity to conduct strategic planning and program evaluation for more than two years.

Turnover, which has historically been quite uncommon at DVR, has also affected the area manager team. Area managers are responsible for providing performance feedback and coaching for those who supervise DVR offices across the state. In 2012, two of the three area managers chose to be demoted rather than to continue in the roles. DVR has had difficulty filling one of the two vacated area manager positions with a permanent candidate.

The interim director deserves credit. He and his team have worked very hard. They have weathered short staffing, hiring freezes, budget cuts, consolidation of some business functions, and they have supported more

people to go to work despite it all. Because of the lack of capacity within the agency for planning and program evaluation, keeping track of the big picture, developing strategies to address issues, and tracking progress on whether the strategies are effective, does not seem to have been as high a priority as meeting the day-to-day challenges. DVR has expressed less overall vision.

The WSRC believes that communicating a vision for the future of vocational rehabilitation in our state will lead to greater respect for the organization's purpose. DVR, and more importantly its customers, deserve the organization's purpose to be understood. We believe this is important because decision makers are more likely to value what they understand. Helping them understand the importance of employment in the lives of people with disabilities is essential to preserving DVR's capacity to serve job seekers with disabilities. The prolonged period of uncertainty has not supported the organization to convey its value or to make decisions that strategically meet changing needs. This extended wait has led DVR to be more risk averse and somewhat stagnant.

Mandate:

Title 1, Section 105 (c)(3) requires the WSRC to contribute to the development of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's State Plan and tracking its implementation.

The WSRC was actively involved in the development of DVR's State Plan from January through July 2012.

The State Plan is a document required of all publicly funded vocational rehabilitation programs by the US Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). RSA is the entity within the federal government that provides guidance and technical assistance to vocational rehabilitation programs. It also allocates the funds appropriated by Congress to each vocational rehabilitation program.

RSA requires each vocational rehabilitation program to prepare and submit a plan that reports on aspects of its operation and establishes the goals and priorities that will guide its approach to service delivery. The life of a state plan is three years. After an initial plan is created and approved in the first year, then the vocational rehabilitation program tracks and reports its progress on achieving the goals and objectives in that plan for each year over the next two years. As it makes progress on achieving the goals and priorities in the plan, according to RSA, the plan should be updated yearly. An entirely new plan is created in year three. Creating a state plan and having it approved is a condition of receiving federal funding. These federal dollars comprise 78.2 percent of DVR's budget.

DVR and the council had expected to create a new plan in 2012. Instead, RSA directed all vocational rehabilitation programs to update existing plans rather than create new ones. Based on those instructions, the WSRC contributed to updating the State Plan in four ways in 2012:

1. We encouraged DVR to expedite the hiring of a staff person to coordinate the drafting and submission of the plan;
2. We facilitated three public forums to seek comment on the draft plan. The first occurred on May 21, in Lynnwood; the second on May 30, in Tumwater; and the third took place on June 4, in Spokane.
3. We wrote a section of the plan reporting on our activities [Attachment 4.2(c)] from October 1, 2010 through September 30, 2011, which we submitted to DVR on March 23, 2012;
4. We wrote a memo to Don Kay, special assistant to the DVR director, on March 31, 2012, in which we took a two-prong approach to contributing to the substance of the State Plan. Because the council did

not know whether DVR would choose to significantly revise its plan or to instead make minor edits, we provided input for either case. We reviewed the goals and priorities included in plans prepared by 13 other states that had already received approval from RSA. Based on the council's analysis of the program challenges facing DVR, we selected five goals from those plans to share with our colleagues for their consideration as possible additions to the State Plan update. We did not expect that all five suggested goals would appear in the final draft. With that in mind, we ranked them according to which we thought would be most likely to contribute to the agency's success. On the chance that DVR was not considering adding new goals or strategies to the plan update, we also suggested smaller changes to the language of the existing goals.

On July 18, 2012, the council received a written response from the interim DVR director about our input in which he said, in part "DVR has incorporated the submitted suggestions, in one form or another, into the State Plan, as it is drafted. The recommendations were very helpful."

Mandate:

Under Title 1, Section 105, (c) (3), the Rehabilitation Act requires the Washington State Rehabilitation Council to make recommendations to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) for the purpose of improving service delivery. It further stipulates that the council provide advice and recommendations to the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS).

The Washington State Rehabilitation Council (WSRC) is fortunate to have an open, constructive relationship with our partners at DVR. Andres Aguirre, DVR's interim director, understands the role of the council. He has been transparent, fair, and easy to work with. Our members appreciate the trust he has placed in our partnership. We also recognize that there are particular challenges and drawbacks associated with serving in an interim capacity for as long as he has been. He has shown an admirable degree of grace and flexibility as a six month position has extended for three full years.

The strongest measure of our partnership is the quality of information the council acquires from DVR. We have reached a point in the relationship that DVR is willing to disclose to us more than only what they do well. The Senior Leadership Team of DVR has also been willing to share data and information with the council that reflects issues the organization is struggling with and areas where growth is needed. We respect that transparency. Some examples of the kinds of information we get include: monthly performance reports, dashboards (a graphic that resembles a gauge depicting performance on the rehabilitation rate, or cases eligible for plan for more than 120 days) for any unit or area, fair hearing information, information about caseload size, the final report on the statewide case review, and subject-specific information upon request. During the last three years there has been little resistance from DVR administrators to share information with us. The WSRC is all too aware that this is the exception rather than the rule nationwide. We thank our DVR colleagues for taking this approach to our partnership. We have demonstrated that their faith in information sharing is well founded.

We have good access to key decision makers at DVR. We meet regularly. We are joined by DVR staff including the director at our quarterly meetings. Our executive director attends the monthly statewide management team meeting. Every other month our council chair and executive director spend a half hour at DVR's meeting of the senior leadership team. In 2012 the council was represented at the following senior leadership team meetings:

(See table on next page.)

Meeting Date	Topics Addressed
January 23, 2012	Status of survey data analysis, highlighted the mental health focus of the meeting, sought input about which data points we would jointly follow throughout the year, touched on the need to prepare for comprehensive needs assessment, and inquired about when DVR expected to hire for the long vacated quality assurance position in the state office.
February 27, 2012	Strategy for recruiting members for open positions in 2012, April meeting plans, the departure of Rob Honan as the director of the State Independent Living Council (and how the SRC staff could be supportive during the transition period).
March 26, 2012	Provided a snapshot of data collected from the customer satisfaction survey and discussed the comments customers provided. The SRC also shared its intention to recognize counselors who were complimented by survey respondents.
April 30, 2012	The collaboration between DVR and Employment Security regarding on the job training, and SRC input for the State Plan update.
June 25, 2012	Martin McCallum, the 2012 Customer Satisfaction and Program Evaluation Committee chair, along with the council's executive director, presented the final customer satisfaction survey report.
August 27, 2012	The need to make progress on a project plan for the comprehensive needs assessment. The SRC reviewed and discussed the benefits and drawbacks of the needs assessment model created by <i>Infouse</i> for the Rehabilitation Services Administration.
December 3, 2012	Further discussed what approach to take to the comprehensive needs assessment. Agreed to contact the Research and Data Analysis Unit within DSHS to determine if they have the capacity to help on the project. Touched on the revenue forecast and the potential of sequestration.

In 2012 the Washington State Rehabilitation Council was pleased to be part of the ongoing dialogue between DVR and the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS.) The council chair and executive director of the WSRC met with the interim DVR director and the DSHS chief of staff in March, June, September, and December.

In 2011, decision makers within DSHS had discussed the possibility of having DVR housed under an administration within DSHS. This would mean a change in who the DVR director reports to. In March of 2012, our goal was to discuss whether a decision was made in this regard. The DSHS Secretary Robin Arnold-Williams confirmed that the decision would be left to the next administration.

In June the meeting focused on the findings of the council's customer satisfaction survey.

In September our council chair met with the DSHS chief of staff to advocate for the appointment of a permanent DVR director. This was an issue the chair had taken up in one-on-one discussion in 2011 also. In our final meeting of the year council representatives questioned why no information about DVR was included by DSHS in the transition documents for the Governor elect's transition team. We argued for the importance of resolving the matter of the extended interim appointment for the DVR director.

Although the WSRC appreciates having an audience with DSHS leaders and values keeping the lines of communication open, we realize that our advocacy with DSHS was unsuccessful.

Mandate:

Title 1, Section 105, (c) (3) and (4) requires the Washington State Rehabilitation Council to partner with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to develop and conduct comprehensive needs assessments.

DVR and the WSRC last completed a comprehensive needs assessment in 2009.

Mandate:

Title 1, Section 105 (C)(8) authorizes the WSRC to “perform such other functions, consistent with the purpose of this title, as the State Rehabilitation Council determines to be appropriate, that are comparable to the other functions performed by the council.”

The council provided training and technical assistance to several partners in 2012 including:

- Sharing our preliminary data analysis from the customer satisfaction survey with members of the Washington State Independent Living Council in January;
- Sharing foundational documents and general information at the request of the Guam SRC;
- Discussing recommendations made by the Employer and Rehabilitation Partnerships Committee to DVR in 2011 with Colorado Department of Rehabilitation Services; and,
- Participating in a retreat of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council for the Blind to discuss aspects of our development as a council and what we might learn from each other.

Pursuing other means of information sharing:

- We produced and distribute a quarterly electronic newsletter in February, May, July, and November of this year; and,
- The council has a website: www.wastrehabcouncil.org.

Representation at conferences:

- The council was represented by our executive director at the annual conference of the Consortia of Administrators of Native American Rehabilitation, which was held in Seattle from November 5-8, 2012. We were honored to be included in the conference and to share information during a partners' panel. There are 29 federally recognized tribes in our state and eight tribal vocational rehabilitation programs here. Our council commends their work and is stronger because of the fine representation we have from the North Inter Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Program.
- In June our Client Assistance Program representative and our executive director attended the National Disability Rights Network conference in Baltimore. No state or council funds were spent to support this travel. Both attended the rehabilitation track of the conference.

The members of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council have been focused and dedicated in 2012 to pursuing our mission, advocating for the spirit of the Rehabilitation Act, and to increasing the likelihood that greater numbers of job seekers with disabilities receive timely, effective, and equitable services from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation so that they can become employed. We are honored to serve the people of our state, particularly those with disabilities. We believe that when principle is combined with political will and individual initiative, equality is within reach.

The Washington State Rehabilitation Council dedicates our work in 2012 to five valued colleagues with ties to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation who died this year:

Amelia Hodges (intern)

Jena Johnson (vocational rehabilitation counselor)

Mark Liberty (vocational rehabilitation counselor)

Kathleen Mularski (vocational rehabilitation counselor)

Marian Norberg (benefits planner)

