



# 2013

## Annual Report

*Prepared for:*

**Jay Inslee**  
Governor

and

**Janet LaBreck**  
Commissioner  
US Department of Education  
Rehabilitation Services Administration



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Dear Commissioner LaBreck and Governor Inslee,

The Washington State Rehabilitation Council is my pleased to submit this report of our activities in 2013 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 Washingtonians with disabilities.

On May 22, 2013, Governor Inslee signed executive order 13-02 *Improving Employment Opportunities and Outcomes for People with Disabilities in State Government* with the goal of doubling the number of people with disabilities employed within state government by 2015. It gives direction to all state agencies to review and revise as necessary all recruiting, hiring, and retaining policy and practices to insure that people with disabilities are fully represented. In addition, the governor has empanelled a select task force of representatives of the public and private sector to advise him on policies and practices to insure that people with disabilities have full access and full participation in the states workforce.

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,

Member, Washington State Rehabilitation Council

## 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 2013, roughly nine thousand Washingtonians sought services from DVR. DVR succeeded at supporting 2,805 people to become employed within the reporting period. Of those who became employed nearly 60 percent reported that wages they earned were their primary source of support compared to when they applied for services. According to the council's most recent Customer Satisfaction Survey published in 2012, 80.6 percent of survey respondents confirmed that they were better off economically after receiving services from DVR.

In 2013, the Washington State Rehabilitation Council has had a constructive, transparent relationship with DVR. We appreciate the good faith and trust that DVR Executive Director Andres Aguirre, his leadership team, and DVR field staff have placed in our partnership. The council has focused much of its attention on gathering and understanding feedback from those who received services from DVR.

DVR performed well on federal performance standards and indicators despite a tough set of practical and operational circumstances in 2013. 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 six of seven federal performance standards and indicators. This was achieved despite successive budget cuts, short staffing (field staff and key management positions.) 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.

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.

## **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 by Governor Gary Lock in 2004 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. Fourteen members served on our council in 2013. 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 2013:

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

Andres director of DVR. 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.

#### **Philip Bradford**, of Tacoma, *representing labor*

Phil 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.

**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.

**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.

**Beth Meyer**, of Shelton representing the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board

Beth works as a grants and programs manager for the WTCEB. 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

**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.

### ***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 2012, the council presented our proposal for a resource plan of \$204,000 for 2013 in a meeting that included Andres Aguirre, interim director of DVR; Joelle Brouner, WSRC executive director; Lorie Christoferson, business services manager of DVR and, council members Jim Larson and Mike Hudson. 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.

## **ACHIEVEMENT OF FEDERAL MANDATES BY THE WASHINGTON STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL IN 2013**

### **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, 2013 in SeaTac
- April 19-20, 2013 in Everett
- July 19-20, 2013 in Yakima
- October 18-19, 2013 in Tacoma

### **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 2013 Proceedings**

#### January 26-27, 2013 in SeaTac

- Ms. Alfie Avlarado-Ramos, Director of the Washington State Department of Veterans' Affairs joined us, to talk about how the VA partners with stakeholders in the community;
- The Council conducted the annual election of new officers: Leandro Razo, elected chair, and Vice chair, Vickie Foster;
- We played VR-opoly, a game Ms. Brouner designed to orient our new members, Philip Bradford and Beth Meyer to the council. Ms. Brouner also talked about the council mandates and the flow of the year, to help the new members start understanding how the council functions;

#### April 19-20, 2013 in Everett

- DVR staff member, Deborah Roberts gave the council an overview of the fair hearing process;
- The council discussed RSA's monitoring visit and gave direction to the executive director to provide the councils input to RSA

- Council Member, Mike Hudson gave a report on the Great Minds at Work initiative between the Association of Washington Business (AWB) and the WA division of Behavioral Health and Recovery
- Council Member, Susan Kautzman and Counsel Executive Director, Joelle Brouner talked about the DVR State Plan and its process and timeline;
- Ms. Brouner also gave an update on DVR in the state budget;
- The council talked about the comprehensive needs assessment and appointed members Jim Larson, Mike Hudson and Phil Bradford to work with the DVR Sr. Leadership team to develop the assessment

#### July19-20, 2013 in Yakima

- Ms. Brouner walked the council through the RSA monitoring report;
- Council Member Mike Hudson presented an overview of the Smart Search System, a program developed with DVR to assist customers who are conducting their own job search achieve employment faster and at a greater starting wage
- The council discussed DVR staffing shortages, DVR's recruiting process, and the challenges DVR faces doing so;

#### October18-19, 2013 in Tacoma

- The council discussed the hiring process and discussed strategies for hiring a new WSRC Executive Director. Council Member Jim Larson was appointed to head the search committee and work with DVR to create a new job announcement, advertise the position, review candidates and conduct interviews.
- The council briefly discussed DVR's statewide case review, (but we look forward to getting a more comprehensive report on that in January 2014);
- The council heard a progress report from our members and the DVR Director who are working on the Comprehensive Needs assessment;
- We asked DVR director about the RSA Monitoring report, and how things are shaping up to deal with RSA's findings;
- DVR Staff Member, Matthew Newton the Tacoma office, gave the council a perspective from the field.

## **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 at three<sup>1</sup> customer forums across the state. This section explores what we learned from those customers.

## **Customer Forums**

In Federal Fiscal Year 2013, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation served approximately 21 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 have been conducted in a “Town Hall” format for several years. Customers are invited to speak to the group and express their thoughts, concerns and, provide suggestions for improvements to the system as they see it. There is no substitute for listening to people talk about their personal experiences, 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 into 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,

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<sup>1</sup> The council usually conducts a member forum at each quarterly meeting. Due to uncertainty over funding, a member forum was not conducted at our summer meeting in Yakima.

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.

While the best possible outcome is that invitees will come to the WSRC forum in person and present their comments, we understand that may not be possible. In those cases, invitees are encouraged to participate by phone or to submit their comments to the WSRC in writing via email or by standard mail. DVR customers are also encouraged to bring family members or advocates with them to the forum to facilitate communication.

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 follows up.

***Forum Comments Quantified and Examined***

<b>Location</b>	<b>Total Customers Invited Per Location</b>	<b>Total Customers Commenting in Person Per Location</b>	<b>Total Telephone Comments Per Location</b>	<b>Total e-mail Comments Per Location</b>	<b>Total Comments Sent Per Location by Postal Mail</b>
SeaTac	44	16	0	11	0
Everett	17	7	0	5	0
Yakima	No forum conducted				
Tacoma	8	6	0	3	0
<b><i>2013 TOTALS FOR ALL FORUM LOCATIONS</i></b>	<b>69</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>0</b>

This year the most frequently mentioned issues by those who provided comment included:

- 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 WorkSource System, level of informed choice regarding job placement or employment goal for people with disabilities
- many customers (even those expressing complaints with the system) expressed heartfelt appreciation for good service rendered by a VRC or other DVR staff member

Beyond the specific feedback the council received, we made some general observations about the customers who attended forums in 2013. The customers who attended most often were those who experience psychiatric disabilities (especially PTSD), traumatic brain injuries 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, reflected by the challenges articulated by those who attended.

### ***What does the council do with the input?***

*During the next day's council session, the previous day's forum is discussed among the council members who then direct the council staff on the development of a written summary of each forum. The summary is provided 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 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.

### **Change of format**

The council has conducted forums using this "Town Hall" format for a number of years. While participation has remained consistent over that time, the council is concerned that we may not be getting the best feedback possible from the customers. In order to get information on specific issues the council feels it needs to hear from the customers we will be initiating a "World Cafe" format in 2014.

Customers will be group into four to five tables, each table will be facilitated by a council member and a scribe. A single question, developed by the council prior to the meeting will be discussed for a designated period of time (10 to 20 minutes, but no more than 20.) At the end of each 20-minute period, customers will be directed to rotate to the next table. Once all customers have rotated through all of the tables, a brief review of the discussions will be conducted.

After the table review, customers will have to discuss specific, individual issues with attending DVR staff as they have in the past.

### **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

In 2013, 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.

**Our analysis of the key challenges facing DVR**

We recognize that DVR is doing many things well. It has exceeded expectations on six 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, 2012 through September 30, 2013*

<b><i>Evaluation Standards (must pass 4 of 7 standards)</i></b>	<b><i>Standard</i></b>	<b><i>Actual</i></b>	<b><i>Pass/Fail</i></b>
<b>Indicator 1.1- Change in Employment</b>			
The number of individuals achieving employment outcomes in the current performance period compared with the previous performance period	2.784	2.805	Pass
<b>Indicator 1.2- Rehab Rate</b>	55.80%	58.68%	Pass

The percentage of individuals receiving services under individual plans for employment who achieve an employment outcome			
<b>Indicator 1.3- Competitive Employment Rate</b>			
Competitive employment outcomes as a percentage of all employment outcomes	72.60%	98.28%	Pass
<b>Indicator 1.4- Significant Disability Rate</b>			
Competitive employment outcomes for individuals with significant disabilities as a percentage of all individuals with employment outcomes	62.40%	97.71%	Pass
<b>Indicator 1.5- Wage Ratio</b>			
The ratio of average VR hourly wages to the average state hourly wage	0.52	0.48	Fail
<b>Indicator 1.6- Increase in Self-Support</b>			
The percentage of individuals achieving Competitive employment outcomes who report their own income as the primary source of support at closure compared to application.	53.0	60.4	Pass
<b>Indicator 2.1-Equal Access to Service Standard</b>			
Access to services for minorities as measured by the ratio of the minority service rate to the non-minority service rate	0.80	0.91	Pass

Given the continued sluggish pace of the economy and a stubbornly high state unemployment rate, WSRC feels that surpassing six of the seven performance standards is a commendable achievement. However, all organizations can improve. Despite what DVR does well, we note one area of performance where our partner can achieve more success:

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 (2012) 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) appointed Mr. Andres Aguirre as the interim director and subsequently began the search for a permanent director. A series of circumstances including the election of a new governor and the re-alignment of DVR within DSHS delayed the process. Mr. Aguirre was not appointed as permanent director until November of 2013.

While Mr. Aguirre did an admiral job of maintaining the division during this time (as demonstrated by the evaluation standards noted above,) the lack of commitment from the previous administration of DSHS resulted in a significant loss of momentum and confidence within DVR. Several key staff positions (Field Service Director and two Area Managers) were left vacant. As a result, DVR staff, CRP's, and other stakeholders became frustrated and impatient with DVR leadership.

Mr. John Clayton Executive Director of Juvenile Rehabilitation Agency (JRA) and DSHS Secretary Quigley have communicated their strong support and belief in Mr. Aguirre's leadership abilities going forward. The WSRC agrees. Mr. Aguirre met with the executive committee of the WSRC in December of 2013. He shared his plans for filling the vacant leadership positions and his vision and plans for the division moving into 2014. We recognize that it will take some time and a considerable amount of effort and support for DVR to regain the momentum lost. The WSRC is committed to doing its part to support DVR leadership in their effort.

### **Observation concerning DVR alignment within DSHS**

During the administration of Governor Christine Gregoire, the director of DVR reported to the Secretary of DSHS through the DSHS chief of staff. With Governor Inslee's appointment of Secretary Quigley, the alignment of DVR was changed placing the oversight of the division under the director of the Juvenile Rehabilitation Agency (JRA.) WSRC was concerned about the change on two points:

1. The realignment did not meet the standard for the relationship between the designated state agency and the designated state unit as outlined in the Rehab Act
2. The difference in the approach and determination of outcomes between vocational rehabilitation and rehabilitation in the context of the juvenile justice system would negatively affect DVR's ability to serve its customers

The WSRC expressed its concerns to the leadership of DVR, DSHS and, to the RSA prior to their monitoring visit to Washington in 2013. This realignment became an action item in the RSA's final report. The WSRC understands that a dialogue between DSHS, DVR and, RSA is ongoing.

To the best of our ability based on review of DVR progress toward evaluation standards and anecdotal evidence revealed during customer forum, customers of DVR have not been negatively affected by the realignment. We are confident that a satisfactory solution and understanding of the realignment will be forthcoming.

### **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 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. The WSRC will continue to provide input and assistance in developing the state plan in 2014.

#### **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 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. He has shown an admirable degree of grace and flexibility.

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.

Under the leadership of Mr. Aguirre, 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 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.

**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 are well into the process of developing and conducting a comprehensive assessment in 2014.

**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 provides training and technical assistance to various partners and stakeholders as requested.

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](http://www.wastrehabcouncil.org).

**Representation at conferences:**

During 2013, Council members and staff members participated in:

- Director Aguirre and council executive director, Brouner attended CANAR, in Seattle.
- Council Chair, Leandro Razo, attended the National SRC training in D.C.
- Council Member, Jerry Johnsen and executive director Brouner attended the National Disability Rights Network (NDRN) conference

**Conclusion**

Given Governor Inslee's leadership and support, a gradually improving economy, the appointment of a permanent director who has the full confidence of the Secretary of the Department of Social and Health Services, DVR staff and building on the accomplishments

made on behalf of people with disabilities in 2013, the outlook for continued progress in 2014 is encouraging

The members of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council have been focused and dedicated in 2013 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.

### *Dedication*

In October, the WSRC reluctantly accepted the resignation of Joelle Brouner as its executive director. Joelle provided leadership, knowledge, perspective and, inspiration to the council since June 2005. Our sadness at losing her is mitigated only slightly with the knowledge that she will continue to be a tireless advocate for the employment of people with disabilities as the Director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for the State of Colorado. We know that she will be successful in her new position, and we dedicate this report to her.