

A Focus Towards the Future



State Rehabilitation Councils (SRCs)

Joelle Brouner, Executive Director of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council; used by permission.

State Rehabilitation Councils were born out of the tradition of effective advocacy by people with disabilities committed to the success of the publicly-funded Vocational Rehabilitation program.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was the first disability civil rights law to be enacted in the United States.

The victory was marred when the Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW) delayed endorsement of the 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, D.C., New York, and San Francisco to pressure HEW to issue the regulations. While the protests in Washington and New York were short-lived, advocates in

San Francisco persisted. They occupied the offices of HEW for four weeks. As a consequence, Joseph Califano, the secretary of HEW, 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 work in service of a system that affords opportunities for customers of the Vocational Rehabilitation program to have more choices on their journeys toward employment. During the reauthorization process of the Rehabilitation Act in 1993, advocates built on their tradition of effectiveness by persuading Congress to create State Rehabilitation Councils (under Title I, section 105) as a mechanism to support people with disabilities receiving vocational rehabilitation services to take an active role in shaping the services they receive.



Collaborative Efforts

Members' collage from the 8th Annual SRC Retreat

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The Vermont State Rehabilitation Council

Vermont's State Rehabilitation Council advocates for consumer-directed and effective vocational services and for the creation of resources and services that will result in equal opportunities for Vermonters with disabilities.

Under its mandate in the Rehabilitation Act, it "shall review, analyze and advise the designated state unit regarding the performance of the responsibilities of the unit...particularly responsibilities relating to...eligibility (including order of selection); extent, scope and effectiveness

of services provided; and functions performed by state agencies that affect or that potentially affect the ability of individuals with disabilities in achieving rehabilitation goals..."

To meet its mission, the Council meets on a bimonthly basis five times a year. (There are no meetings in July or August.) SRC committees meet between full Council meetings to help conduct Council business.

www.vtsrc.org



From the Vice-Chair of the Vermont State Rehabilitation Council

The Vermont State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Steering Committee is charged with the task of considering and deciding upon necessary SRC business between meetings of the full Council. The Committee set agendas for the full Council meetings taking into consideration topics most pertinent and timely to the operation of the SRC. The Steering Committee achieved its goal and guided the VT SRC to a very productive year.

The most pertinent area of focus for this year's committee was the impact of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act on Vermont VR. The Steering Committee organized some fantastic presentations from VR staff at the full member meetings regarding the impact of Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) and the new Common Performance Measures.

Another area of focus for the Steering Committee was SRC membership. In 2015 the SRC had 6 members resign and

3 members whose terms ended. The Steering Committee worked with SRC Coordinator Rebekah Stephens to find new members to replace those leaving the Council. The Steering Committee commends Rebekah's diligence and effort in securing new members and have happily welcomed 4 new members already this year.

Finally the Steering Committee worked on planning the 2015 VT SRC annual retreat. The Committee is excited to have created an agenda that combines opportunities for the SRC members to connect and build relationships with opportunities to celebrate 2015 successes and plan for 2016 priorities.

Also of note Kerry White, SRC chairperson, resigned this year. The Steering Committee would like to extend a special thank you for her leadership and guidance this year.

*Adam Leonard, Vice-Chair
Vermont State Rehabilitation Council*



From the Director of the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation



It has been a challenging year for VocRehab Vermont. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) passed the US Congress and became law. WIOA reauthorized the Rehabilitation Act and made many major changes to the law. Most significant was the inclusion of Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS). PETS required VR to expend 15% of the agency's federal award to provide 5 required services to in-school youth. This is the biggest service delivery change I have experienced in many years as VR director. PETS required us to reallocate \$1.3 million in year one and \$2.25 million in year two to serving youth from age 14 to school exit. We ended two programs that served adults. We reallocated our counselor capacity to create 14 in-school counselors and 14 young adult counselors with the balance serving adults. We paired the in-school and young adult counselors with youth employment specialists. I believe we successfully made this transition with a minimum of disruption for staff and our consumers.

WIOA requires us to write a Unified Plan with the Agency of Education and the Department of Labor. The Plan needs to be completed for public comment on 2/1/16 and submitted to the Rehabilitation Services Administration and the Federal Department of Labor by 3/2/16. We have been meeting and working with these entities to identify the strategic vision and goals and an operational plan. We see significant opportunities for integrated and coordinated services for youth and adults. There is substantial work that needs to be done to meet the requirements for seamless services and data sharing.

Within the Unified Plan are Common Performance Measures. The standards and indicators that were part

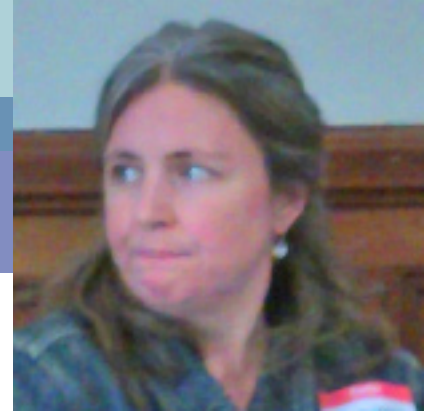
of the Rehabilitation Act are gone and we are going to be held accountable to the Common Performance Measures. These six measures include job retention at six and twelve months, median earnings, credential attainment, measurable skill gains, and employer engagement. The last three are not clearly defined in the proposed regulations. Yet, we have to set targets for each of the six measures as part of our Unified Plan submission. As a management team we have identified significant opportunities to increase earnings by providing much expanded training opportunities.

At the same time as we are implementing WIOA, we are on a track to purchase AWARE, an electronic case management system from Alliance Enterprises. This system is successfully used by 33 VR agencies across the country. Our current system is a dinosaur that will never meet the WIOA federal reporting requirements. We have made many false starts down this road and are very excited about the purchase of AWARE. "Going Live" will require an intensive year of hard work. AWARE will be in compliance with WIOA by the time we go live.

We are an agile, flexible agency that puts the customer first and is committed to continuous improvement. Our biggest challenge is to integrate all this change in a way that sustains the culture and values we have built over the years. We are tested by the work ahead of us but are very motivated by the new opportunities. We look forward to doing this work in a strong and productive partnership with the SRC.

*Diane P. Dalmasse, Director
Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation*

The Year in Review – Summary SRC Committee Reports



Policy and Procedures Committee

Kerry White, Chair

The Policy and Procedures Committee traditionally reviews and revises the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) policies on a three-year cycle; this allows work on other tasks including spending guidelines and a periodic review of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) By-Laws.

The Policy and Procedures Committee chose to refrain from revising chapters in anticipation of the finalized federal regulations formulated in response to WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014). The committee members speculated that the new regulations would likely have an impact on the DVR policies and procedures manual.

The Policy and Procedures committee discussed the possibility of submitting comments regarding the proposed regulations. After reviewing the proposed comments made by DVR, the SRC made the decision to support those comments.

The Policy and Procedures committee took the opportunity to discuss which term should now be used for individuals utilizing the services of DVR.

The committee preferred the term “eligible individual” and for a person not eligible for services to be termed “applicant”.

DVR made all the recommended changes on the previously reviewed eleven chapters;

- ...Chapter 104 - Division for the Blind and Visually Impaired
- ...Chapter 107 - Ticket to Work
- ...Chapter 202 - Eligibility
- ...Chapter 203 - Individualized Plan for Employment

- ...Chapter 205 - Post-Employment Services
- ...Chapter 207 - Authorization and Approval of Expenditures
- ...Chapter 208 - Expenditures in Status
- ...Chapter 301 - Counseling and Guidance
- ...Chapter 305 - Personal Services
- ...Chapter 310 - Supported Employment
- ...Chapter 311 - Training

The completed chapters were made available for public comment. Updated chapters are available for review on the DVR website and are provided in a new viewing format that makes them easily accessible for individuals with visual impairments. In addition, they clearly outline what is policy and what is guidance. All future chapters will be made available in this format. The Policy and Procedures Committee is looking forward to continuing to review and revise chapters in 2016 in a manner consistent with the new WIOA regulations.

The Policy and Procedures Committee seeks to foster policies and procedures that will provide successful attainment and retention of employment for individuals with disabilities who seek assistance from DVR. The Committee has open candid discussions about the policies and procedures and strives to produce high quality material for use by DVR staff and the individuals seeking their assistance. As Chair of the Policies and Procedures Committee, I would like to thank DVR and the Committee members for their dedication and hard work. It has been a pleasure working with each of you.



Advocacy, Outreach and Education Committee

Sarah Launderville, Chair

National advocacy issues have been the focus of discussion for the AOE Committee, as the Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) moved into implementation during 2015.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) is remaining within the Rehabilitation Services Administration; however, a unified state plan will be developed between DVR, Department of Labor and the Agency of Education. The challenges around this and the desire to maintain the current level of DVR services will guide conversations into the new year.

While the Committee focused on the bigger national picture, issues closer to home were also explored. Discussions around offering basic Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) training for DVR and the Vermont Association of Business, Industry and Rehabilitation (VABIR) counselors took place early in 2015. ADA training for DVR and VABIR counselors is scheduled for early spring.

The Committee members also discussed how Corrections involvement can create a barrier to employment for some DVR consumers.

2015 saw the fruition of ongoing advocacy efforts in the approval of mandates to enhance the work incentives of the Medicaid for Working Persons

with Disabilities (MWPD) program. After years of advocacy on the part of many dedicated individuals the Vermont Legislature signed S. 138 into law.

Education is a big part of the Committee's focus and to that end, Committee members along with DVR staff spent a day at the Statehouse interacting with legislators.

The AOE Committee is dedicated to ensuring the level of services offered to DVR consumers remains consistent with an ever present goal towards improvement. With this in mind, the Committee members set some broad goals for 2016.

Committee members have developed an action plan that will allow AOE to be mindful of the Medicaid budget, ensure that ground is not lost with the new WIOA regulations, review the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program's (SNAP) work requirement and monitor the national implementation of Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS).

I would like to thank all of the Committee members for their hard work and dedication. The last 6 years have been a wonderful experience for me. I have enjoyed working with all of you!



Performance Review Committee

Adam Leonard, Chair

The Vermont State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) Performance Review (PR) Committee is responsible for reviewing, analyzing and advising the Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) on its performance in fulfilling its mission and responsibilities. To that end the PR Committee focused its efforts this year in three distinct areas: researching the expunging of criminal records and its impact on DVR, discussing feedback received at the DVR annual retreat in the SRC informational session and examining DVR's Order of Selection process.

In February of 2015 the committee revisited a concern brought up during a panel discussion on mental health disability closures in June 2014. It was shared that Vermont's process for expunging criminal records is rather arduous and often negatively impacts the ability of DVR clients to obtain employment. Following robust discussion it was decided that the AOE committee would take on the further exploration of this topic.

The PR Committee also spent time reviewing feedback received during a breakout session at DVR's annual retreat. Specifically focusing on feedback that DVR staff lacked line of sight on what was

happening within the SRC. Takeaways from this discussion were that, while this was not necessarily the opinion of all staff, enhanced communication between the SRC and DVR counselors would be welcome. To that end the PR committee developed a newsletter to be shared quarterly with DVR staff in order to allow them insight into the SRC's work and priorities.

In June the PR committee examined data regarding cases served from Order of Selection (OOS) from FFY 2012 to the present. As part of the discussion it was noted that an unexpected data point was that DVR was spending, on average, the same amount of funds on Category 3 cases as they are on Category 1 and 2 cases. Moving forward DVR has decided to examine changing their OOS process. PR will await an update on DVR's decision on what changes they will be making and will review all changes.

Looking forward to 2016 the PR committee anticipates being actively involved in examining the changes DVR will be making in response to the new WIOA regulations, and we are excited to partner with DVR in ensuring their success in achieving the new standards that have been established.

Vermont State Rehabilitation Council Members - 2015

Steering Committee

Kerry White, SRC *Chair*, Policy and
Procedures Committee *Chair*

Adam Leonard, SRC *Vice-Chair*,
Performance Review Committee *Chair*

Sarah Lauderville, Advocacy, Outreach
and Education Committee *Chair*

Diane Dalmasse, Division of Vocational
Rehabilitation *Director*

James Smith, Division of Vocational
Rehabilitation *Budget and Policy Manager*

Policy & Procedures Committee

Kerry White, *Chair*

Nancy Breiden

Michele Hubert

Spencer Lemons

Sam Liss

P. Neal Meier

Leslie Walker Mitchell

Patti Shane

James Smith

April Tuck

Ben Wimett

Advocacy, Outreach and Education Committee

Sarah Lauderville, *Chair*

Alaina Clements

Diane Dalmasse

Martha Frank

Sam Liss

Leslie Walker Mitchell

Whitney Nichols

Patti Shane

Olivia Smith-Hammond

Anthony Williams, Jr.

Performance Review Committee

Adam Leonard, *Chair*

Samantha Brennan

Julia Burakian

Spencer Lemons

Christopher Loso

Leslie Walker Mitchell

James Smith

Ellen Vaut

Anthony Williams, Jr.

List In Alphabetical Order

Nancy Breiden

Samantha Brennan

Julia Burakian

Alaina Clements

Diane Dalmasse

Martha Frank

Michele Hubert

Sarah Lauderville

Spencer Lemons

Adam Leonard

Sam Liss

Christopher Loso

P. Neal Meier

Leslie Walker Mitchell

Whitney Nichols

Patti Shane

James Smith

Olivia Smith-Hammond

April Tuck

Ellen Vaut

Kerry White

Anthony Williams, Jr.

Ben Wimett

VR's Contribution to Vermonters and Their Communities

Creating Opportunity, Creating Jobs

VocRehab Vermont's core mission is to realize human potential by putting meaningful work within reach of Vermonters with significant disabilities.

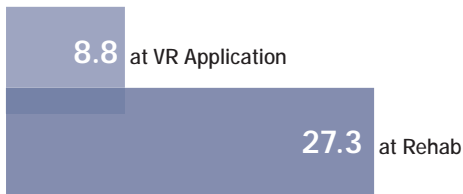
We help VR consumers figure out what work will work for them through careful assessment, counseling and guidance from our expert staff.

We capitalize on our extensive networks in the employer community to create job opportunities

and make good placements that match employer needs with jobseeker skills, and help employers retain staff with disabilities.

We use our financial resources within Vermont communities to support our consumers as they transition to stable employment, and our employers as they try out new workers.

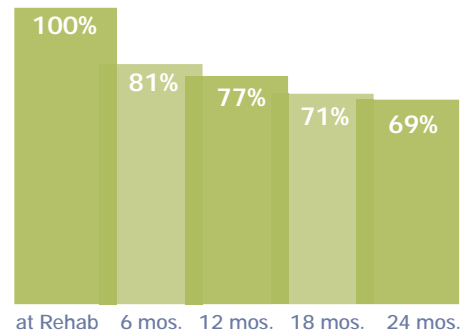
Change in Average Hours Worked Per Week FFY 2015



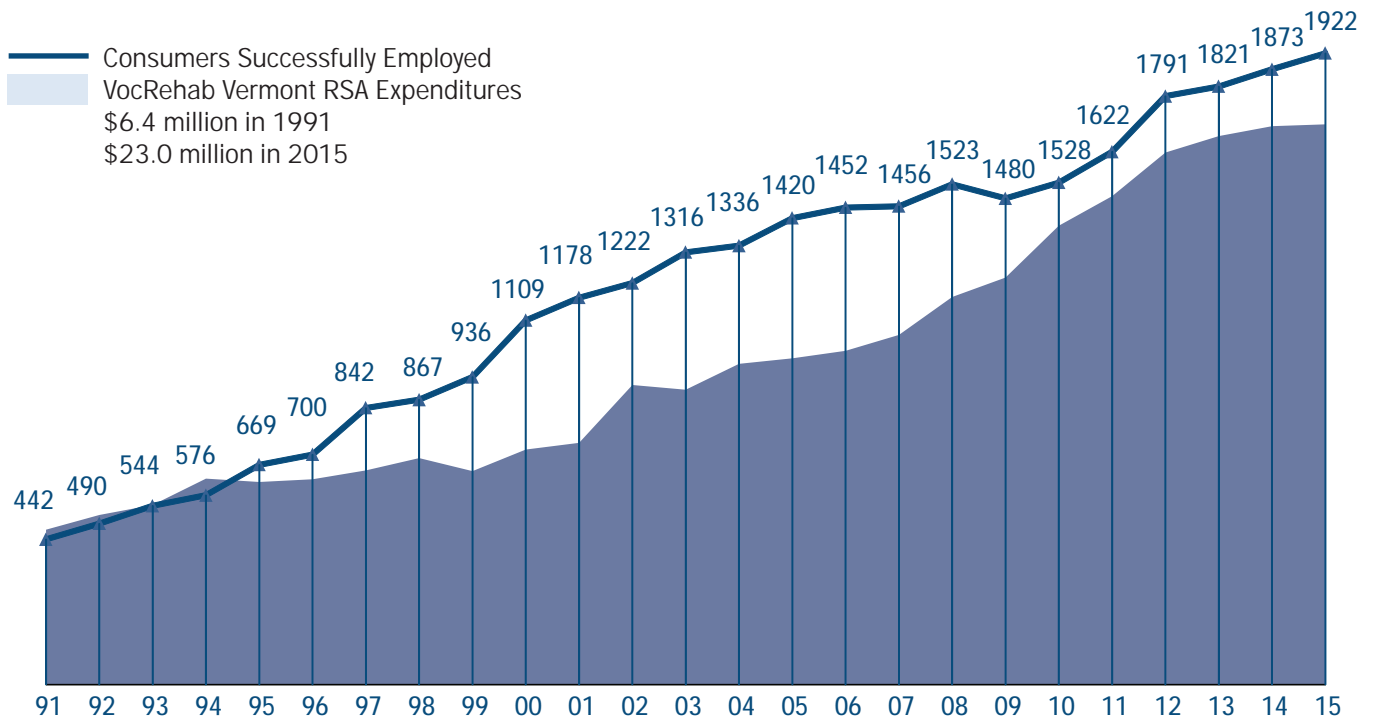
Change in Average Weekly Earnings FFY 2015



Employment Retention Rate, VR Consumers Closed Successfully FFY 2010-2012



VR Consumers Successfully Employed & VocRehab Vermont RSA Expenditures – FFY 1991-2015



Resources for Growth, for our Future

VocRehab Vermont is funded primarily by the Rehabilitation Services Administration in the U.S. Department of Education. About 80% of our funding is federal money which goes into the local economies of Vermont towns—to local stores to purchase work tools and clothing; to health care providers and medical equipment suppliers; to community colleges and technical training programs; to transportation providers; and to Vermonters in community agencies who provide support services for workers with disabilities.

Vermont's rankings

RSA ranks public VR agencies on their performance each year. Our record:

New VR applicants per million state population—we're doing a great job of reaching out to as many Vermonters as possible.

in New England: 1; in the nation: 1

VR employment outcomes per million state population—we're effective in getting Vermonters in for VR services and on to successful employment.

in New England: 1; in the nation: 1

Average expenditure per employment outcome—we get results without spending more than we need to, leaving resources for others.

in New England: 1; in the nation: 4

Ticket participation rate—we help many SSA beneficiaries return to work and actively claim reimbursement from SSA for these services. As a result, we bring more federal money into the State to serve Vermonters with disabilities.

in New England: 1; in the nation: 1

Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act

The Federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) went into effect on October 1, 2014 and required significant changes in the way that Vocational Rehabilitation does business, with no additional funding. One aspect of this Act was that Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) be provided for high school students with disabilities aged 21 or under, who are receiving special education services or are eligible under Section 504, and have not yet graduated.

Since 2001, Vermont's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation has had VR Counseling staff dedicated to working with transition-age youth. This program grew steadily in size and effectiveness, serving students generally in their senior year and into their early twenties. To be in compliance with new WIOA regulations, a decision was made to reallocate VR Counselor caseloads. Now 14 Transition Counselors work with in-school youth, 14 Young Adult Counselors work with those who have graduated or left school, and the remaining counseling staff of about 30 focus on the adult population. Additionally, VR designated Youth Employment Specialist (YES) staff to work in conjunction with the Transition Counselors.



The Vermont State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is appointed by the Governor. We seek new members who have a wide range of interests and talents to help improve the services offered by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to the citizens of Vermont with disabilities. If you are interested in applying to become a member of the SRC, please contact Rebekah Stephens, Coordinator.

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