



# **2008 Annual Report**

## **Text Only**

Dedication:

The 2008 Annual Report is dedicated to those working in the field at the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation with appreciation and respect from Washington State Rehabilitation Council members. We celebrate your success in serving all on the waiting list, your determination to assist a greater number of people in going to work, and your creativity.

Dear Governor Gregoire and RSA Commissioner Anthony,

On behalf of the members and staff of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council, it is my pleasure to share our 2008 annual report for your review. It has been an honor to serve as the Chair of the Council this year. This report details our accomplishments in service of the people of Washington state, particularly those with disabilities seeking employment or career advancement by utilizing the services of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Our members have forged a bond based on our common interest in the success of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program and the customers it serves. We commend our partners at the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for the notable improvements they have made in 2008. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors in the field rose to the challenge of serving all those who had been waiting for vocational rehabilitation services, increasing the number of people determined eligible for services, the number of Individual Plans for Employment developed, and the rate of customers who achieve successful rehabilitation.

The Washington State Rehabilitation Council has contributed to the positive developments within the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation by being a voice of conscience in the policymaking process. Government sometimes establishes well-meaning policies that have unintended outcomes. The role of our Council is to ensure that customer perspectives are considered in a meaningful manner. I believe the Council is effective because the Division does not take our partnership for granted. They are engaged in our meetings and responsive to our recommendations.

On a more personal note, I have worked in the public sector since 1971. My career has focused on employment and workforce development. I am a policy analyst for the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board. I believe my service to the Council and in the field of workforce development is important because assisting dislocated workers and helping those seeking employment to find new and quality work opportunities allows families to have the resources they need to stay together and be strong. Employment provides stability and opportunities for further achievement. We cannot afford to underutilize workers with disabilities any longer.

Our society has been slow to recognize the talents and employability of people with disabilities. My own experience reflects how perceptions of people with disabilities can change. My first job with the State of Washington was to assist residents with developmental disabilities living in an institution to develop pre-vocational skills. Today I serve on a State Rehabilitation Council built by people with disabilities who are leaders in state government.

Washington state is making gains towards integration and full participation for people with disabilities but there is still work to be done. According to the 2006 Disability Statistics Report, published by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Disability Demographics and Statistics at Cornell University, "In 2006, the employment rate for people without disabilities in Washington was eighty percent and the employment rate for people with disabilities was 40.5 percent." This is a stark reminder of the potential we are wasting.

Many Washingtonians with disabilities have the skills employers need to meet the challenges of our time. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation stands ready to partner with employers interested in hiring workers with disabilities. Members of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council appreciate the opportunity to serve and to draw attention to the valuable role that workers with disabilities can play in contributing to the economic development of our state now and in the years to come.

Sincerely,

Martin McCallum

Chair, Washington State Rehabilitation Council 2008

Dear Governor Gregoire and RSA Commissioner Anthony,

I wish I could bottle the energy of the volunteer members of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council. If it could be shared with our colleagues across the country, the discussion of how to achieve economic advancement in the disability community would have an infusion of direction and purpose from the Evergreen State.

The WSRC has been strong and focused in 2008. We have supported substantive dialogue, made practical recommendations, and asked challenging questions of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. The partnership between our Council and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is effective because of a mutual recognition of our common interest in the success of jobseekers with disabilities.

Our members have reason to be proud of the positive, productive service ethic they have sustained. The factors that contribute to the cohesion of the Council are difficult to qualify. I attribute the group dynamic to the abiding optimism and pragmatism of highly talented people who prioritize the full participation and economic advancement of people with disabilities in communities across the state of Washington. These members succeed because of their ability to link a disability-positive philosophy with the examination of factors influencing service delivery within the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. The Council believes that effective Vocational Rehabilitation will result in economic gains for individual customers and will lead to economic advancement for the community of Washingtonians with disabilities. We work in service of that goal every day.

Just as the Council is making progress, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation has regained its focus and improved its performance markedly this year. We are pleased that at a time when the nation is facing historic economic difficulties, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation no longer has a waiting list for services. Our partners are better prepared than they have been in years to serve people with disabilities who want to go to work.

I appreciate the opportunity to work for excellent volunteers, in service of the people of Washington State, and the promise of economic advancement of the disability community I belong to.

Respectfully,

Joelle Brouner  
Executive Director  
Washington State Rehabilitation Council

Dear Governor Gregoire and RSA Commissioner Anthony,

Greetings from the Director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. It's an honor to provide this message in the 2008 Annual Report. This has been a remarkable year for our division. In February our staff achieved something that was long overdue. Through hard work, determination, and by meeting higher expectations our staff put an end to the waiting list for services. We increased our rehabilitation rate and strengthened our partnerships with the disability community and others by keeping our word.

The State Rehabilitation Council plays an essential role in strengthening the effectiveness of the vocational rehabilitation program. The Council has been a key partner in asking questions that we factor as we create policies and practices to assist more customers to go to work. Whether drawing together experts in high school transition, or supporting the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to examine what it will take to increase opportunities for customers to work to their fullest potential and earn more, the Washington State Rehabilitation Council has been a conscientious policy partner. We at the Division appreciate your contribution to our success.

Sincerely,

Lynnae Ruttledge

Director

Washington Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

## **The Establishment and Purpose of State Rehabilitation Councils**

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 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 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 work in service of a system that affords opportunities for customers of the Vocational Rehabilitation program 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 1 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.

The Washington State Rehabilitation Council (WSRC) was established in 1994. The WSRC is a 16-member, Governor-appointed board of volunteers made up of 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 and parent education organizations; and partners from Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Programs.

The role of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council is to be a policy partner to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. We identify systemic issues and trends that need to be addressed and make recommendations designed to improve the quality and availability of services through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for eligible people with disabilities seeking employment or career advancement.

### **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.

## An Overview of the Operations of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council in 2008

### **Staffing**

The Washington State Rehabilitation Council (WSRC) is fortunate to have the labor of a full-time Executive Director and a half-time Executive Assistant. Both Council staffers are employed by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Our staff work solely in service of the Council and are accountable to Council members.

From January 2006 until July 2008 the Washington State Rehabilitation Council and the Washington State Independent Living Council were served by one, full-time Executive Assistant who split her time between the Councils. When the position was vacated we revisited that arrangement. Now there are two distinct half-time positions, one for each Council. This has increased WSRC productivity and clarified lines of reporting.

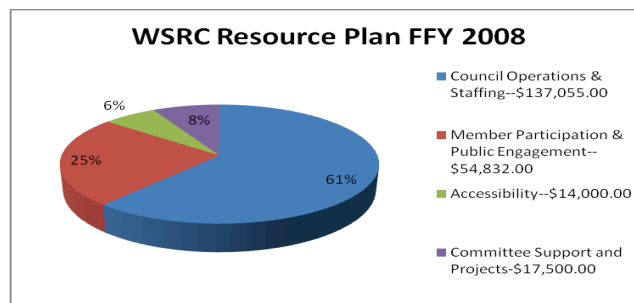
### **Resource Plan**

Colleagues serving on State Rehabilitation Councils in other states and territories have inquired to learn how we have advocated for staffing and the resources necessary to pursue our federal mandates.

The Council has used the federal law as the basis for negotiating our resource plan. Title I Section 105 (d) 1 of the Rehabilitation Act, requires the State Rehabilitation Council to develop a resource plan annually and to negotiate with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to secure those resources. The law states in part,

“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.”

On June 27, 2007 The Council and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation successfully negotiated our 2008 budget. We receive an allocation of \$223,387.00. The Council believes that the budget allocation we received reflects the Division’s respect for our partnership and our work.



## **Member Recruitment, Appointment, Retention, and Training**

### ***Recruitment***

The strength of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council depends on the commitment, knowledge, and engagement of our members. We have been attentive to recruiting strong candidates to fill vacancies as they emerge.

In May, Linda Pratt of Toppenish resigned as our representative of Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation Programs after four years of service. With her assistance we succeeded in recruiting Sharey Cleveland of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation. Ms. Cleveland is the Interim Program Manager of the Colville Nation's Vocational Rehabilitation Program. She will serve out the rest of the vacated term.

In addition to recruiting one new member, two members sought reappointment: Sandra Carr, of Spokane, representing the Washington State Independent Living Council, sought a second full term and Jim Larson of Olympia who first served on the Council for six years from the time it was founded. After taking some time away he returned in September 2006 to serve out a term vacated by a former member representing Business and Industry. After serving out the vacated term, Mr. Larson applied for reappointment.

Joanne Butts, our member representing Washington PAVE will be completing her term of service in September 2009. This year Joanne identified a likely successor and began orienting the successor to the Council.

### ***Appointment***

The members and staff of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council express our gratitude to Stacey Tichenor, Boards and Commissions Specialist with the office of Governor Chris Gregoire. Because of Ms. Tichenor's efficient efforts to vet our candidates for Council service, the Governor was able to act quickly. We received confirmation that appointments were made in just six weeks.

### ***Retention***

The Washington State Rehabilitation Council has succeeded in retaining a strong base of members. We have no vacancies. The Council attributes our success in retaining members to the members' individual commitments to service, frequent communication from Council staff to members, and robust member support.

Member appreciation is a key to sustaining morale and cohesion among our membership. Some of the ways we express appreciation for the service of our members include:

- Naming each Council member in the masthead of the quarterly newsletter;
- Sending a letter from the Director of Vocational Rehabilitation welcoming members upon appointment;
- Making time on our January quarterly meeting agenda for member appreciation activities;
- Featuring a member in each quarterly newsletter;
- Profiling members on our website and in our annual report;
- Sending hand-written thank you notes to each member at least once a year.

These strategies cost little and pay dividends in terms of member engagement and fostering a positive group dynamic.

Our members are empowered when they are informed. The Council Chair, Committee Chairs and our staff keep us apprised of matters that relate to our work plans. We ask our staff to assist us in gathering and processing a bulk of information, including DVR performance data, fair hearing information, reports, and subject specific information.

Sustaining accessibility and facilitating full participation are essential to the integrity of a Council led by people with disabilities designed to promote systemic changes within the Vocational Rehabilitation system. As a standard practice we provide a basic level of accessibility for our members based on the needs we can anticipate. Anyone who needs additional support are welcome and encouraged to request reasonable accommodation. Beyond basic courtesy and legal compliance, the Washington State Rehabilitation Council is challenging itself to think expansively about how a fully accessible Council operates. Some of the questions we are exploring include:

- What practices might we adopt and incorporate as a regular course of business that make it easier for people with visible and less visible disabilities to engage?
- Within the guidelines that all State affiliated Councils adhere to, how might we do business in a manner that does not stigmatize or dissuade recruits with limited resources to serve and be welcome?
- How can we draw on the expertise and perspectives of a more diverse base of candidates for Council membership?

We have not answered these questions, but we are grappling with them.

**Member Training**

Training opportunities are made available to the full Council. Individual members may also request Council sponsorship to participate in training, if the training relates to our mission, and if we have the means. In 2008, our member received the following training:

| <u>Full Council</u>   | <u>Individual</u>  |
|---|--|
| Rehabilitation Law Academy—April;   | Understanding Your Rights in Education<br>Kimmer Gordon—March;   |
| Expert Panel Discussion: Supporting Successful Transition from High School to Work—July;  | Meeting of the Conference of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (Including the proceedings of the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils)<br>Joanne Butts—April; |
| Expert Panel Discussion: Community Rehabilitation Program Perspectives on Partnering with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation—July; | Rehabilitation Services Administration Region IX and X Training Forum for State Rehabilitation Council Chairs, Martin McCallum—June;   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Council Development/Orientation—October;    | Statewide Behavioral Health Care Conference<br>Jeffry Abe Gunter—June; |
| Job Shadowing at the SeaTac Office—October; |  |
| Online E Rehab Modules—October;             |  |

**Our Members and Their Commitment to  
Serving the People of Washington State**

The Washington State Rehabilitation Council is a working Council. We ask our members to make a considerable time commitment. The staff of the WSRC conservatively estimates that our 16 Council members collectively volunteered 1,250 hours of service to the people of Washington State in 2008. This is equal to nearly two, 40 hour work weeks per member.

Each member contributes to the success of four two-day quarterly meetings each year and serves on two of our six standing committees. Our members advance committee work by participating in conference calls between the quarterly meetings.

These volunteers take time away from their paid work and their families, not because of an interest in parliamentary procedure or an enjoyment of reviewing and commenting on draft strategic plans. They serve because they recognize the potential of the Vocational Rehabilitation process to help people with disabilities discover and refine their skills. Witnessing customers of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation going to work and building their own opportunities motivates our membership.

When asked why he has been willing to serve on the WSRC for four years, John Harrison, of Olympia said, “I believe in the mission and vision of the Council. Instead of wishing that the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation would improve, we help it become a stronger, more responsive system. The members work together to achieve concrete goals. There are people with a range of opinions. We respect each other and work towards coming to consensus.”

Here is more information about our members:

***Jeffry Abe-Gunter***  
Spokane

Jeffry has represented Labor on the WSRC for four years. He is a Shop Steward for the Washington State Employees Union. Jeffry works as a Case Resource Manager in Spokane for the Division of Developmental Disabilities. His role within the Division of Developmental Disabilities allows him to empathize with the realities of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors working in the field. He always encourages the Council to support practical tools and opportunities for Counselors to build relationships with those providing direct service in other systems. Jeffry spends the time to follow up individually with Council colleagues, representatives of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and customers who attend our forums to ensure that practical resources are shared.

***Joanne Butts***

Orting

Joanne is a mother of eight. One of her adult sons has disabilities. Joanne has been a long-time advocate for parents and their children with disabilities as the Executive Director of Washington PAVE. Washington PAVE is a parent training and advocacy center that provides a range of training and advocacy opportunities. Originally a person without a disability, Joanne became blind as an adult and sought support from the Department of Services for the Blind to address her barriers to employment. Joanne's gift to the Council is her well-developed ability to listen and to hear the impact of the topic on people's lives.

***Sandra Carr***

Spokane

Sandra represents the Washington State Independent Living Council on the WSRC. She is serving her second term with our Council. Sandra has been a customer of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in the past, and is now a professional in the field specializing in vocational evaluation, job development, and independent living training for people with disabilities and those who are deaf or hard of hearing. This year Sandra started her own business. She is a warm observant advocate willing to share her expertise with new Council members.

***Sharey Cleveland***

Nespelem

Sharey is the most recently appointed member of the WSRC and our only member who lives in a remote rural area. She is a member of the largest tribe in the State of Washington, the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Nation. She is the acting interim Manager of their Vocational Rehabilitation program. Sharey has also worked in systems to support the safety of children and their families. In addition to her commitment to employment for people with disabilities, she has a particular interest in issues facing those with substance abuse and head injuries.

***Lou Colwell***

Seattle

Lou has served on the WSRC for four years representing the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI). She has built her career in education as a classroom teacher, principal, and now, as someone working on special education policy. Lou contributes to our Council with her attention to detail and strength as a wordsmith. During our July meeting in Spokane, Lou was one of the featured speakers on our Transition Panel. She illuminated the role of OSPI in monitoring compliance with federal and state laws. Lou enjoys her work with her fellow Council members because of their passion in the work they all do for the Council.

***Kimmer Gordon***

Blaine

Kimmer represents current customers of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for the Council. After owning and operating an auto detailing business, Kimmer decided to make some professional changes. He went to work for a rental car agency this year.

Kimmer is an optimist with a can-do spirit. He is a leader on our Council who broadens our geographic representation to the northwest corner of the state. Kimmer began as an advocate in the Developmental Disabilities community. He has a strong interest in the transition from high school to work and is always interested in opportunities to learn.

***John Harrison***

Olympia

John worked for more than two decades as a school guidance counselor. Before counseling, he was a teacher and a coach for speech and debate. During his four years of service on the Council John has applied his expertise to discussions of the transition from high school to work. He has been a leader in our efforts to learn from customers of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

***Rudy Hernandez***

Burien

Rudy has worked for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for fifteen years as a Counselor. For many of those years he carried a caseload in the SeaTac office. This year he was promoted to supervise that office. Rudy is a deliberative listener. As a veteran of the Vietnam War, he brings an awareness of the experiences of veterans and their families to his service with the WSRC. Rudy has family living in rural and urban areas across the state. He helps us to consider the provision of Vocational Rehabilitation from the small town and big city perspectives. He has worked nationally on barriers within the workforce for Latino elders.

***Jerry Johnsen***

Seattle

Jerry is the Director of Washington State's Client Assistance Program. His interest in the disability community began with a desire to serve older people and then broadened. He worked as a home health care provider. Jerry went on to dedicate his career to employment for people with disabilities as an advocate. He began working for the Client Assistance Program before it was an independent entity. Jerry is passionate about his work and has an even greater desire to promote and sustain a vocational rehabilitation process that has integrity. During our April meeting in Wenatchee, Jerry co-facilitated the Rehabilitation Law Academy training.

***Jim Larson***

Olympia

Jim comes from a family tradition of supporting the success of people with disabilities in employment. Jim's uncle was a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and a supervisor for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. His father was the Executive Director of a Community Rehabilitation Program in Bellevue. Jim has charted his own course in the field of employment for more than 30 years. He is the Chief Executive Officer of Morningside, a community rehabilitation program with a record of supporting hundreds of people living in Thurston, Mason, and Grays Harbor Counties to secure and maintain employment each year. As the Chair of the Customer Satisfaction and Program Evaluation Committee, Jim has worked purposefully this year to engage with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to do the foundational work for the comprehensive statewide needs assessment.

***Carol Maher***

Olympia

Carol works for the Washington State court system to increase accessibility to the judicial process for people with disabilities. She brings an extensive knowledge of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Washington State building code to her work. Carol has the heart of a fierce advocate. She brings passion and a desire for progress on behalf of customers of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to our Council. Carol also works part time as a respiratory therapist, professional experience she gained from training that was part of her Individual Plan for Employment earlier in her career.

***Martin McCallum***

Olympia

Martin is our current Council Chair. He brings a wealth of experience from 33 years of service in the Workforce Development System. Currently, Martin is a Policy Analyst for the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board. He has served on the WSRC for four years. Through his seasoned leadership the Council's Executive Committee has become increasingly active. Our quarterly meeting agendas have continued to be filled with substantive work. Beyond professional and Council service, Martin's happiness comes from being a grandfather. He collects American art pottery and enjoys travel.

***William Murray***

Wenatchee

Bill is our former two-term Council Chair who has served on the WSRC for four years. Much of our success as a Council can be attributed to the foundation he built with his even-keel approach to leadership and dogged determination. Bill is a self-employed consultant who works to increase educational opportunity for school-aged students with developmental and psychiatric disabilities. This year he chaired our Council Effectiveness Committee. In addition to serving on the WSRC, Bill is a Rotarian and the Secretary for the Wenatchee Valley Enological Society.

**Bob Roberts**

Spokane

Bob brings eclectic work experience to his Council service. He had a distinguished career in the military, serving in the Navy and the Army. He was decorated for service to the nation during the Vietnam War. Bob went on to work in the construction trades, where he was recognized for promoting innovation in the use of apprenticeships. Bob has served on the WSRC for four years and continues to chair our Planning and Policy Committee. This Committee co-sponsored the State Plan Forums with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in May of this year. He has been a dedicated servant of the Council who is willing to make himself available to represent us with limited notice.

**Lynnae Rutledge**

Ex-Officio

Olympia

Lynnae became the Director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and an ex-officio member of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council in October 2005. At that time fourteen 14,000 Washingtonians were waiting for services from the division on a seemingly intractable waiting list. In February of this year the staff of Division of Vocational Rehabilitation succeeded in serving all those waiting for services.

Clearly there is still work to be done, but these achievements are a testament to determination.

Outside of her work, Lynnae is an avid hiker and cyclist. She enjoys traveling internationally.

**Kris Tefft**

Olympia

Kris is the General Counsel for the Association of Washington Business (AWB). He advises the Association's members on employment law and represents their interests before the Legislature and the State Supreme Court, where he previously worked as a clerk. AWB is a member-driven industry group that advocates for policies which allow small and large businesses to remain competitive. Tefft believes that the opportunity to prosper should be extended to everyone who is willing to work, a belief that motivates him to serve on the Washington State Rehabilitation Council.

**Understanding the Partnership between the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Washington State Rehabilitation Council**

The Washington State Rehabilitation Council operates with a high degree of autonomy but we are not wholly independent from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. The Council and the Division have a policy partnership defined by the Rehabilitation Act. Our Council is funded by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Although the Council's Executive Committee supervises our staff, our staff members are employees of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

The Council is responsible for providing input during the development of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's State Plan. The State Plan details the proposal from the Division of Vocational

Rehabilitation for how it will provide services to eligible customers. The plan is required by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). RSA is part of the U.S. Department of Education. When Congress allocates federal funds for Vocational Rehabilitation programs, the funds are sent to RSA and then disbursed to the respective states and territories. RSA also provides technical assistance to Vocational Rehabilitation Programs, and monitors program performance and compliance.

One way the Council participates in the development of the State plan is by writing a section which documents input we have received from key stakeholders, and highlights the systemic trends and issues needing attention. It includes the specific policy recommendations we made to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation during the year.

### ***The Partnership in Practice***

Commitment from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Washington State Rehabilitation Council is essential to the success of the partnership. Lynnae Ruttledge serves as an ex-officio member of the WSRC. This, however, is not her first term of service on a State Rehabilitation Council. She has had a longtime appreciation for State Rehabilitation Councils going back to her days as a member of the Oregon Rehabilitation Council (ORC).

The ORC has earned a reputation for effective advocacy. Several years ago, when the State of Oregon was proposing to restructure its human services delivery system, the Vocational Rehabilitation program was at risk of being consolidated into a larger service structure that would have been disadvantageous to people with disabilities seeking employment. Employees of the Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Program were operating in a political environment that compromised their capacity to advocate; Not so for the advocacy efforts of the ORC. The Council is widely credited with thwarting the reorganization proposal.

Fortunately for the Washington State Rehabilitation Council, Lynnae Ruttledge served on the Oregon Rehabilitation Council. She witnessed firsthand that the relationship between a designated state unit and a committed Council of Governor appointed volunteers can make a critical difference to the Vocational Rehabilitation program itself.

Because of her awareness of the power of the partnership with the State Rehabilitation Council to serve the interest of the Vocational Rehabilitation program and the customers it serves, Lynnae has supported our partnership well by:

- Attending quarterly Council meetings regularly and customer forums without fail;
- Encouraging the management team and staff of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to support our meetings with their presence and expertise;
- Negotiating the annual resource plan in good faith.

Members of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council recognize that we are more fortunate than many of our colleagues across the nation. Even though we appreciate our good fortune, there are practical challenges and dynamic tensions within our Council structure and our relationship to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, for example:

- Recommendations made by the WSRC are more likely to be implemented and effective if they reflect an awareness of the realities of providing services in the field. Our members have less frequent contact with those working in the field than with members of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's Senior Leadership Team. The Council strives to balance a range of perspectives when crafting recommendations.
- Because the Director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation serves as an ex-officio member of our Council, when Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor's make presentations before the Council, they are presenting before the person with the most supervisory authority within the Division. It is difficult for the Council to assess what, if any, pressure those in the field feel when they share information with us.
- When the Council identifies a service delivery challenge or program performance concern we are challenged to provide applicable recommendations in a timely manner. This is due in part, to the fact that we meet only four times a year and because it takes time to determine whether the matter is a local anomaly or a broader systemic issue.
- The Council is not an independent entity. We are funded by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Our staff is employed of Washington State. Although the Council Chair supervises the Council's Executive Director, the staff positions are maintained within the organizational structure of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. We operate with autonomy, but that autonomy can be attributed more to the integrity of the Director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the diligence of our members and staff than to our Council structure or any formal agreements.

### **The State of Affairs within the Washington State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation**

If there was ever a reason to offer unabashed praise for a Vocational Rehabilitation agency, the Washington State Rehabilitation Council has found it. In February of 2008 the Washington Division of Vocational Rehabilitation achieved something which many considered improbable at best: They succeeded in serving all the customers who had been patiently waiting on what seemed to be an intractable waiting list for services. The waiting list reared its head for the first time in November of 2000. The Rehabilitation Act requires that when a Vocational Rehabilitation agency has fewer resources than customers eligible for service, it must prioritize resources for those defined as "most significantly disabled"; followed by those defined as "significantly disabled"; and lastly for those defined as "disabled." This process of prioritization is called *Order of Selection*. Washington State had the dubious distinction of the longest waiting list in the nation, which ballooned to 15,000.

Operating under the Order of Selection severely limited the potential of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and more importantly, the customers it serves. The scarcity had a deleterious effect on staff morale, damaged the Division's credibility with the community of people with disabilities seeking employment, and with other divisions of state government and organizations serving people with disabilities.

When Lynnae Ruttledge accepted the position of Director of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in October of 2005, she may have been the only person in the nation who was convinced that the Division

would serve everyone. She also believed the Division would officially request permission from the Rehabilitation Services Administration to come out of the Order of Selection, and chart a new way forward. The rest of us thought it was a great way to interview for a tough job.

She was right.

While the success began with Ms. Rutledge's unflappable contention that it would come to pass, the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and Rehabilitation Technicians working in the field were the ones who did the heavy lifting. Everyone had to buckle down and work harder. Some counselors could not imagine what it would be like to work for the Division if there was no waiting list for services. Half of the Counselors working for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation have only worked for the organization while there was a waiting list.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Washington State Rehabilitation Council are still learning what to expect from the post-Order of Selection reality.

There is increasing success on a number of the federal standards and indicators. More people are being determined eligible for services and making progress toward the development of Individual Plans for Employment. The rehabilitation rate is on the rise. The foundation of the organization is sounder than it has been in years.

While the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is in better stead than it has been, the same cannot be said for the Washington State budget forecast. A significant deficit is being projected. Existing vacancies, including openings for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, are not being filled in the foreseeable future. This increases pressure and the workload for existing staff.

Other factors contribute to concerns about maintaining appropriate staffing levels in the mid range and long-term. Like other Vocational Rehabilitation agencies across the nation, Washington Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is aware that fewer qualified candidates are graduating from rehabilitation programs. Competition for qualified candidates is growing. Many of the Division's most experienced staff will be eligible to retire in the next five years.

The Senior Leadership Team is taking some proactive steps to mitigate the impact of these factors. The educational qualifications for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors have been expanded. A pathway to becoming a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor which combines schooling with internships has been established.

The Division is also challenged to recruit and retain a staff that represents the wealth of diversity within the State of Washington. The Washington State Rehabilitation Council is pleased to see growing representation of people with a range of disabilities, particularly in leadership within the Division; however, there continues to be underrepresentation of people of color throughout the agency.

Despite admirable progress, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation still faces important work ahead. The Council is troubled that in some of the most meaningful ways customers have yet to benefit from these positive developments. The average hourly wage at closure hardly advances survival, let alone the American dream. Customers are taking the leap of faith to go to work without realizing much gain. The number of hours people are working each week has declined. While we strongly commend progress on

other performance measures, wages and economic advancement are what will matter most to the customers, who are after all the reason why the program itself exists.

**Federal Standards and Indicators  
2007 and 2008 results as of September 2008**

|  | <b>Standard</b>   | <b>2007</b> | <b>Pass/Fail</b> | <b>2008<br/>ytd</b> | <b>Pass/Fail</b> |
|--|-------------------|-------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| <b>1.1:</b> The number of individuals achieving employment outcomes during the current year compared to the previous year.   | Previous year + 1 | 1,831       | <i>Fail</i>      | 2,120               | Pass             |
| <b>1.2:</b> The percentage of individuals receiving services under an individualized plan for employment who achieve employment.   | 55.8%             | 54.7%       | <i>Fail</i>      | 60.9%               | Pass             |
| <b>1.3:</b> Competitive employment outcomes as a percentage of all employment outcomes.  | 72.6%             | 98.4%       | Pass             | 98.8%               | Pass             |
| <b>1.4:</b> Competitive employment outcomes for individuals with Significant Disabilities as a percentage of all individuals with employment outcomes.                           | 62.4%             | 100%        | Pass             | 99.5%               | Pass             |
| <b>1.5:</b> The ratio of the average hourly wage of customers employed at closure compared to the state average hourly wage.   | .52               | .51         | <i>Fail</i>      | .51                 | <i>Fail</i>      |
| <b>1.6:</b> The percent of individuals achieving competitive employment who report their own income as their primary source of support at closure as compared to at application. | 53.0              | 57.4%       | Pass             | 51.8%               | <i>Fail</i>      |
| <b>2.1:</b> Access to services for minorities as measured by the ratio of the minority service rate to the non-minority service rate.  | .80               | .90         | Pass             | .89                 | Pass             |

## The Mandates of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council

The Washington State Rehabilitation Council has responsibilities within the Rehabilitation Act under Title 1, Section 105. Our mandates fall into five categories:

**1. The Washington State Rehabilitation Council analyzes trends emerging within the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.** Council members evaluate factors, perspectives, and data to identify overall trends within the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. We identify how the systemic trends may impact the Division's statewide performance. We analyze internal data, and data produced by community partners the Division contracts with to achieve employment outcomes.

We did this in 2008 by:

- Reviewing monthly data trend reports developed for the Director of Vocational Rehabilitation;
- Participating in the Governor's Management Accountability Program (GMAP) presentations made to the Department of Social and Health Services about the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's performance;
- Reviewing fair hearing data each quarter. The data led us to identify concerns about closure as the most frequent basis for seeking resolution. We will be requesting more detailed information in 2009 to determine whether this trend is concerning.
- Reviewing the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's online intranet performance measuring graphic known as the dashboard;
- Using national data produced by the Rehabilitation Services Administration to compare the performance of the Washington Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to other Vocational Rehabilitation programs across the country;
- Making requests for subject specific data as needed.

**2. The Washington State Rehabilitation Council seeks input from stakeholders.** We evaluate customer satisfaction with services they receive from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. When the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is developing its State Plan, the Council holds forums to garner comment on the activities the Division prioritizes, as well as the strategies it will implement to promote innovation. Our members make ongoing efforts to connect with current, former, and future customers of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, their families, those providing direct service to the Division's customers in the field, those who contract with the Division to support them in achieving successful employment outcomes, other Workforce Development partners, and interested parties.

We did this in 2008 by:

- Determining whether the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation made any changes to practice based on recommendations made by the Washington State Rehabilitation Council following our 2006 Customer Satisfaction Surveys;
- Holding four customer forums in the locations of each of our quarterly meetings;
- Co-sponsoring State Plan forums to seek input by strategies proposed by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for delivering service and promoting innovation;
- Together in partnership with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, laying the groundwork for a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment;
- Organizing the inaugural *Say Hey Spokane*, a professional networking and meet-and-greet opportunity patterned after a similar event held in Portland, Oregon which was adapted by Lynnae Ruttledge, held on a quarterly basis in Olympia and replicated in communities across the state.
- Producing *The Rehab Council Connection*, an e-newsletter distributed quarterly.

**3. The Washington State Rehabilitation Council advises the Department of Social and Health Services and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in the development of policies, procedures, and guidelines related to the provision of Vocational Rehabilitation services.** Members of our Council and our staff participate in work groups charged with amending the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's internal policies and procedures. We provide advice on the development of state statutes that pertain to the provision of vocational rehabilitation services. The Council provides advice and comments on proposed amendments to the Rehabilitation Act. We offer this advice through an ongoing dialogue with the Senior Leadership Team of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, through Section 4.2c of the Division's State Plan, and by educating legislators and the public.

We did this in 2008 by:

- Contributing to the development of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's State Plan;
- Providing comments when amendments were proposed to policy and procedure within the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation included in its Customer Service Manual;
- Providing guidance to inform the negotiations with partners in higher education on the development of an interagency agreement which was finalized in 2008;
- Establishing an ad-hoc committee on veterans issues and encouraging the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to update its existing interagency agreement with partners at the federal Veterans Administration.

**4. The Washington State Rehabilitation Council evaluates whether the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation provides services effectively.** The Council weighs factors regarding the effectiveness and overall performance of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. We consider internal data, data presented to the Department of Social and Health Services and the Governor in the Government Management Accountability & Performance (GMAP) process, input regarding customer satisfaction with services, and guidance from the Rehabilitation Services Administration. We share our observations with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in an ongoing dialogue and provide input to the Rehabilitation Services Administration during its monitoring process.

In addition to reviewing the data and program evaluation information mentioned in previous mandates, we did this in 2008 by:

- Examining how the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation could increase its contribution to the success of eligible young people with disabilities making the transition from high school to work or higher education;
- Exploring factors influencing the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's relationship to community rehabilitation programs and the impact of those factors on organizational performance;
- Learning more about the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's approach to serving Latino or Hispanic customers;
- Noting the unsuccessful progress by engaging the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation on achieving the standards related to "the ratio of the average hourly wage of customers employed at closure compared to the state average hourly wage," and "the percent of individuals achieving competitive employment who report their own income as their primary source of support at closure as compared to at application."

**5. We recommend changes to policy and practice and advocate for reform and innovation within the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.** The Council influences policy development through our ongoing dialogue with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and our participation in work groups and taskforces. We make recommendations based on analysis of primary and secondary data. When we identify systemic trends, members request additional information and frequently advocate for action that catalyzes change.

We did this in 2008 by:

- Seeking input from the Client Assistance Program regarding trends emerging in their advocacy efforts;
- Proposing a slate of 10 motions in October to increase communication between the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, its partners in providing transition services, parents, guardians, and students to increase the likelihood that more young people with disabilities will achieve successful rehabilitations;
- Beginning to probe the capacity of community rehabilitation programs to provide bilingual/bicultural services;
- Encouraging the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to adopt the recommendations from “Latinos with Disabilities in the United States: Understanding and Addressing Barriers to Employment,” a report produced by the World Institute on Disability and Proyecto Vision, and funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration.
- Seeking additional information from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation on the proposed “ratio of the average hourly wage of customers employed at closure compared to the state average hourly wage,” and “the percent of individuals achieving competitive employment who report their own income as their primary source of support at closure as compared to at application.”

## **A closer look at the 2008 Quarterly Meetings of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council**

### ***January 17-18, 2008—Lacey***

In Lacey, we advanced committee work goals. During the full Council meeting we followed up with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to determine what action was taken on two of the recommendations the Council made following our 2006 Customer Satisfaction Surveys. In December of 2007, Centralia and Chehalis were flooded. The local office of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation was affected by the flood and uninhabitable for business. Tina Bredengerd, the Supervisor of the office, and Cindy Murray, the Special Assistant to the Area Manager, highlighted the extreme efforts of local staff to locate customers affected by the flooding, to maintain communications with one another during a natural disaster, to get the office in working order, and to clean up flooding in their own homes. The Washington State Rehabilitation Council commends the managers, staff, and community members for their dedication to service in extreme circumstances.

### ***April 17-18, 2008—Wenatchee***

In Wenatchee, we advanced committee work goals. Council members participated in the Rehabilitation Law Academy, a four-hour training about the Rehabilitation Act. We also focused on the dynamics of increasing caseloads.

On February 14, 2008 the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation achieved a long awaited milestone: It succeeded in serving the last customers on its waiting list.

Success brings challenges. With all the customers coming off of the waiting list and working toward developing Individual Plans for Employment, some providing direct service in the field were deluged. In some cases, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors went from very low caseloads to caseloads exceeding 125, in some cases, more. We refer to this phenomenon as “the bulge” and while it was not anticipated to be the new “normal,” it required everyone to rise to the occasion.

The Council dedicated a significant piece of its agenda to learning more from staff of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation about the dynamics of “the bulge,” and its implications on staff morale and capacity as well as the quality and consistency of services across the state.

We also focused on the Division’s approach to serving Hispanic/Latino people with disabilities. In preparation for this discussion we purchased and reviewed a report entitled “Latinos with Disabilities in the United States: Understanding and Addressing Barriers to Employment.” The report, which was produced by the World Institute on Disability and Proyecto Vision, and funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, provided extensive insight and recommendations. We supplemented the national perspective with input from the local area by inviting Duane Johnson, Teresa Kutsch, and Val Smith to discuss local approaches to service provision in Central Washington.

In May of 2008, when the Council submitted Section 4.2(c) of the State Plan, we submitted an additional document to our partners at the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation which, although not formally part of our submission to the State Plan, encouraged them to adopt the recommendations made in “Latinos with Disabilities in the United States: Understanding and Addressing Barriers to Employment.”

### ***July 24-25, 2008—Spokane***

In Spokane, we advanced committee work goals. Council members took leadership in organizing expert panels on two topics: Supporting Successful Transition from High School to Work, and Community Rehabilitation Program Perspectives on Contracting with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

#### **Transition**

Successful transition requires successful partnerships, so we invited partners to illuminate different aspects of the process. We were joined by four panelists: Maureen Roberts, Cinda Johnson, Lou Colwell, and Karen Blaine.

Maureen Roberts has worked for the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation for 22 years and is currently a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Lead in the Kent office. Ms. Roberts illuminated the role of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in the transition process and made observations from her experiences working with young people.

Cinda Johnson, is the Principal Investigator for The Center for Change in Transition Services, which is affiliated with Seattle University's School of Education. The Center also coordinates the Post-school Outcome Survey activity for Washington State. Her comments on our panel addressed key findings from the post-high school follow-up data from the most recent survey on youth in transition, and state and local initiatives to improve Individual Employment Plans transition outcomes.

Our own Lou Colwell addressed federal requirements and the role of the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction in monitoring and shared information about the status of the negotiation between the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation on an interagency agreement.

Karen Blaine is a Spokane-based advocate for parents and their children with disabilities. Mrs. Blaine has worked for Washington PAVE since 1986. Her comments on the panel provided suggestions on how DVR can better support parents and students in negotiating the transition from high school to work.

The Council's Executive Committee developed 10 motions based on the content of this discussion for full Council consideration at our October quarterly meeting. In 2008, the Council approved 19 motions.

#### **Community Rehabilitation Programs**

Community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) contract with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to assist the organization in serving customers with multiple barriers to employment who may need longer term support to succeed on the job. CRPs provide six services to customers referred by the Division: trial work, vocational evaluation, job placement, job coaching, intensive training, and transitional employment.

In recent years, three factors have influenced the relationship between the Division and CRPs: concerns on the part of the Division about the number and quality of closures for customers working with CRPs; dynamics created by the Order of Selection which contributed to an unpredictable flow of referrals to CRPs, and a willingness on the part of CRPs to work with people facing the most challenging barriers to employment; and revisions to the contractual agreement to emphasize outcome based measures verses units of service

In Spokane, the Washington State Rehabilitation Council sought to learn more about the relationship between the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and its CRP partners by inviting four panelists to share their perspectives with us: Cindi Kirchmeier, Rob Martin, Jim Larson, and Andres Aguirre.

Cindi Kirchmeier is the Senior Vice President of Morningside. She holds a Masters Degree in Rehabilitation Administration and has 25 years direct service experience. Her comments illuminated the scope of services provided by CRPs and some observations about the benefits and drawbacks of the current contract.

Rob Martin is the president of Chinook Enterprises, a CRP doing business in Skagit County. Mr. Martin has been supporting people with disabilities to go to work since 1973. In addition to his work with his organization, Mr. Martin is a surveyor for the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF). His comments addressed the standards required for accreditation.

Jim Larson is a member of our Council and the Chief Executive Officer of Morningside. His comments addressed the challenges of sustaining CRP capacity during the Order of Selection. While Mr. Larson agreed that CRPs should deliver high quality outcomes, he also hoped that the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation would have a greater recognition of the impact of decreased revenue streams from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation on the organizational capacity of CRPs.

Andres Aguirre, a Program Administrator with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation with a role in bolstering the relationship with CRPs, addressed efforts by the division to increase the capacity of CRPs to achieve quality outcomes.

By January of 2009, the Washington State Rehabilitation Council's Interagency Liaison Committee will identify other steps that we can take to understand how the relationship between the Division and CRPs in a post Order of Selection context.

#### ***October 16-17, 2008—SeaTac***

In SeaTac, we provided orientation rather than holding committee meetings. As part of a larger slate of orientation activities, we introduced our members to [www.erehab.org](http://www.erehab.org), the online training curriculum developed by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, and made a visit to the SeaTac office of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

Elsbeth Calvo, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor working in the Kent office, introduced us to the potential of Wellness Recovery Action Plans as a tool to support customers with psychiatric disabilities to achieve successful rehabilitations.

Together with guests from the Senior Leadership Team of Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Council members explored the factors contributing to the Divisions' unsuccessful performance on federal standards and indicators pertaining to "the ratio of the average hourly wage of customers employed at closure compared to the state average hourly wage," and "the percent of individuals achieving competitive employment who report their own income as their primary source of support at closure as compared to at application."

In 2009 the Council will continue to follow these issues.

## **A Closer Look at the Customer Forums**

During every quarterly meeting of the WSRC, we hold a public forum. We do this to acquire feedback and identify trends in the vocational rehabilitation system. We organize our forum close to our meeting times and locations so that our members can engage with the community of people with disabilities in a local community. We publicize the forums by sending invitation notices to every person with an open case with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in the county where our meeting is being held. We also encourage local DVR office staff to attend, including vocational rehabilitation counselors and technicians, office managers, area managers and stakeholders from the Client Assistance Program in order to address specific needs of individuals who attend. We also provide ASL interpreters at every forum and will happily accommodate any disability related needs upon request. This allows for unique perspectives varying by geography and population and allows us to hear from the broadest possible base of community members with an interest in the vocational rehabilitation process.

In 2008, our most successful forum was the one that occurred in tandem with our October quarterly meeting in SeaTac. Roughly forty people attended. Fifteen customers with open cases in King County spoke during the forum. Some shared frustration; others highlighted successes or shared observations based on their personal experiences navigating the vocational rehabilitation process. The role of council members during the forum was to listen for information illuminating trends or bottlenecks in the service system. More than any forum we hosted in 2008, the experience of the customers of King County highlighted the realities of poverty and the consequences of unemployment for those living in a county with a high cost of living. We noted frustration about waiting—not waiting for services as much as waiting for information, return phone calls, and for the VR process itself. There seemed to be some confusion about the steps within the VR process.

In addition to sharing their thoughts, customers benefitted from the follow up of representatives of the Client Assistance Program, DVR field staff and administration who were available to assist in the resolution of individual case concerns.

Our members appreciate all customers and DVR staff who joined us.