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The Rehab Council Connection

October 2009

Volume 2, Issue 4

A quarterly e-newsletter

In the bug: WSRC Annual Report Coming In January

Left Side Bar: Jeffrey Abe-Gunter, Spokane; Valerie Arnold, Elma; Don Brandon, Mountlake Terrace; Sandra Carr, Spokane; Sharey Cleveland, Nespalem; Vickie Foster, Seattle; Rudy Hernandez, Burien; Michael Hudson, Bellingham; Jerry Johnson, Seattle; Susan Kautzman, Grandview; Jim Larson, Olympia; Vanessa Lewis, Tacoma; Martin McCallum, Olympia; R.L Roberts, Spokane; Lynnae Ruttledge, Olympia ex-officio

President Taps Ruttledge for Top Job at the Rehabilitation Services Administration

If you had asked Lynnae Ruttledge for an assessment of her professional future four months ago, odds are, she would have expressed the intention to finish out her career as the Director of the Washington's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Then the game changed altogether.

On October 19th, after a formidable round of interviewing, and upon completing an arduous vetting process, Ruttledge was nominated by

President Obama to serve as the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

Ruttledge now awaits confirmation from the US Senate. The nomination will be brought to the Health Education Labor and Pension Committee, chaired by Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) for consideration. The Senate's current focus on healthcare reform legislation may delay action on the nomination. Few, if any obstacles to confirmation are anticipated.

A native of Michigan, Ruttledge has adopted the northwest as her home. She makes the most of living here. As an avid outdoorswoman and tandem cyclist, moving to the other Washington will be a bitter sweet change of pace. Still, the opportunity to serve at the federal level and to influence the VR program nationally is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. During her tenure as the Director

of DVR, Ruttledge has gained a reputation as a hard worker who expects her staff to work at least as hard as she does. She has increased individual performance expectations and advocated for counselors to manage caseload budgets. Ruttledge arrived in Washington with the unwavering belief that DVR could and should overcome its eight-year stint of operating under Order of Selection. She pushed staff and community partners alike, to believe that it was not only possible, it would happen. And it did.

Washington DVR has prepared Ruttledge for the challenges she is bound to face at RSA. She goes to RSA with open eyes but cannot predict what lies ahead. Those who follow the field of Rehabilitation at a national level anticipate the longstanding debate about the placement of RSA to continue. For some time the administration has been housed within the Department of Education, a placement that many believe best

positions RSA to pursue the intent of the Rehabilitation Act. The alternative placement is Labor. The long overdue reauthorization of the Rehabilitation Act may, at last, be tended to. RSA has staffing vacancies. Building a full complement of staff and increasing organizational capacity to provide timely technical assistance and data to the states is another challenge.

The members and staff of the WSRC wish Lynnae Ruttledge well in the next chapter of her career. We stand ready to assist DSHS to identify her successor.

Upper Right Side Bar: Save the date: WSRC Meeting Activities:
Customer Forum January 14th: 2:30 to 4:00: Full Council Meeting
January 15th: All activities held at Ramada Hotel 4520 Martin Way E
Olympia, WA 98516: ASL Interpretation Provided: Bus routes 62a and
62b: Stop at Martin and College.

Lower Right Side Bar: Inside This Issue: President Obama Taps
Ruttledge for Top Job at RSA, 1: WSRC Advocates for DVR, 2:
Spokane Customers Turn Out, 3: Flood Preparations, 3.

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Left Upper Side Bar: Thank you Governor Gregoire for Acting on the
WSRC's Request for Appointments! On September 25th we welcomed
five new members including: Valerie Arnold, Representing the Office of
the Superintendent of Public Instruction; Vickie Foster, Representing

Current or Former DVR Customers; Michael Hudson, Representing Business & Industry; Susan Kautzman, Representing Community Rehabilitation Programs; Vanessa Lewis, Representing Washington PAVE; Jeffrey Abe-Gunter, Representing Labor; and Martin McCallum, Representing the Workforce Training & Education Coordinating Board were reappointed. These seven members will serve through September 2012. Governor Gregoire left one position reserved for a current or former customer of DVR, vacant to achieve cost savings.

Photo (with description) appears courtesy of The Seattle Times.

Secretary is pictured leaning forward with her hands crossed. Susan Dreyfus is wearing a serious expression on her face. She is Caucasian.

She wears her hair short. It is brown with lighter highlights.

The WSRC Advocates for DVR with DSHS Secretary Susan Dreyfus

The WSRC welcomed DSHS Secretary Susan Dreyfus to our state and to our most recent quarterly meeting. The Secretary, who came to Washington by way of Wisconsin, built a career in public service by supporting the safety of children and families. She also headed a national organization advocating for access to behavioral healthcare. Secretary Dreyfus has been hosting dialogues with stakeholders statewide to listen and to share her priorities. She is on a mission to transform DSHS from an organization that operates like a patchwork safety net of individual programs, to an organization with a unified identity that provides services based on a common mission and set of core values.

WSRC members were interested in knowing more about the drivers influencing the Secretary's vision, especially regarding the placement of Vocational Rehabilitation within the organizational structure. Members

were mindful of preserving DVR's programmatic and budgetary integrity because the Secretary decided that direct service programs, including DVR, would not report to her office.

She sought WSRC input about alternative placements for the Division within the Department. We prepared a response highlighting the importance of preserving DVR's capacity to meet its federal mandates. The Council also explained the essential role that Business Services and IT staff play in the operation of the program. Our members also emphasized the necessity of securing four million dollars of state general funds in federal fiscal year 2011 which would enable DVR to bring 14.8 million dollars of federal funds to our state.

During our meeting with the Secretary members reinforced our initial response with additional information. It was a productive exchange. WSRC Chair Jim Larson said of the meeting with Secretary Dreyfus "The Secretary has a clear sense of purpose. She listened to the concerns we shared, and understood them." The Secretary told the Council that she did not see the need to act quickly to identify an alternative placement for DVR. She also agreed to consult with us before acting and sought our assistance in reviewing the job description for the position of DVR Director and in the upcoming reauthorization of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families.

The Planning, Policy and Advocacy subcommittee of the WSRC will be following up on the Secretary's request for further input in the coming weeks. We appreciate the Secretary's time, open dialogue, and interest in further collaboration.

Right upper Side Bar: Secretary Dreyfus is advocating a single mission, vision, and core set of values to inform service delivery across all

programs housed within DSHS. The core values are: Decreasing poverty; Improving health status; Increasing access to employment and education, and; Increasing the potential of DSHS customers to live their fullest lives.

Lower Right Side Bar: Other Highlights from the October Quarterly Meeting: New member orientation Jennifer Gordon & Kathie Grignon discussed rural service delivery; Panelists implementing Spokane's Green Jobs Inclusion Initiative showcased efforts.

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Spokane Stakeholders Turn Out and Speak Up

Approximately sixty residents of Spokane County who have been, or are being, served by DVR turned out at our latest customer forum. The purpose of the forum was to listen to those using the system to find work, to consider their observations about navigating the process, to celebrate their successes, and to acknowledge the bottlenecks and frustration they experience.

In the last week of September the WSRC sent out notices to the 1,086 customers with open cases publicizing the opportunity to comment. The

customers were clear, empathetic, and fair in their analysis of how the DVR services in Spokane are meeting their needs.

In general, speakers expressed an appreciation of DVR staff. Those who commented perceived that growing caseload sizes had decreased access to their Counselors. Speakers expressed a desire for more frequent contact, follow-up, and timely responses from Counselors.

One speaker was frustrated that the services being offered were not tailored to her needs.

Our members appreciate the constructive support of the Client Assistance Program and DVR staff that followed up to resolve customer concerns.

Green River Valley Residents Prepare for Flooding

The Green River Valley has undergone major development in recent decades. Once rich farmland is now marked by pavement, sub divisions and a “Super Mall.” What made the growth possible? The Howard A. Hanson Dam. From 1962, when it was dedicated, until recently, few had given the dam much thought. That changed when the Army Corps of Engineers discovered that the dam, which was built in part of the remnants of a landslide is seriously compromised. Extensive flooding is probable.

Between now and March, Green River Valley residents, including roughly 600 DVR customers, face flooding if heavy and prolonged rain occurs this flood season. Authorities are encouraging residents of Auburn, Kent, Renton, South Seattle and Tukwila, especially those with disabilities, to be prepared to evacuate on short notice. If you, or

someone you serve, needs to plan it is time to get started. Be prepared not scared. You can educate yourself about local emergency planning contingencies. Tips to support planning efforts can be found at: <http://www.ready.gov/america/getakit/disabled.html> .

DVR and other state agencies are working to limit potential disruptions in service. Flexibility may be required as the situation develops.