

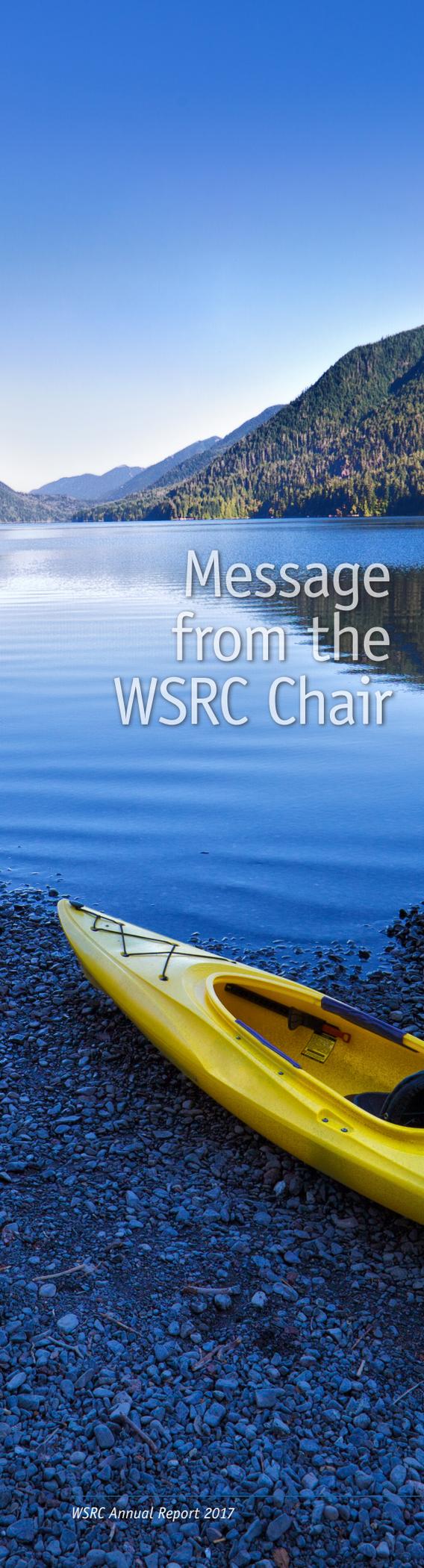


Washington State Rehabilitation Council  
*Building Inroads to Employment and Success*

# Washington State Rehabilitation Council



**2017 ANNUAL REPORT**



# Message from the WSRC Chair



Dear Acting Commissioner Dobak and  
Governor Inslee,

On behalf of the Washington State Rehabilitation Council (WSRC), I am pleased to present the 2017 WSRC Annual Report. It was a year of growth and expansion for the Council -- we added new members to achieve full membership and focused their time and many talents on efforts to increase the opportunity for more individuals with disabilities to go to work and advance in their careers.



As a priority, the WSRC continued investing time to hear from and understand the concerns and needs of those served by the Washington Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). In this report, we share the feedback of more than 2000 DVR customers who completed a customer survey the WSRC implemented in 2016. Through this and other engagement, the Council identifies and amplifies customer concerns and works actively and constructively with DVR to promote solutions.

This year brought significant change for DVR. Leadership changed at all levels of the department, including the appointment of a new DVR Director. Rob Hines assumed the position of DVR Director on March 16, 2017 amid numerous WIOA implementation demands and the need to initiate an Order of Selection. Despite these challenges, DVR staff maintained their focus on serving DVR customers and facilitating the employment of 3103 individuals in competitive, integrated employment.

Council members have deep appreciation for DVR's hard work and we genuinely applaud DVR's progress and achievements in 2017. We also take seriously our responsibility to convey DVR customers' needs and concerns, and to advise DVR in areas of program effectiveness. To fulfill that role, we will continue to advocate and work for improvements that strengthen DVR's ability to advance equity and achieve meaningful employment outcomes for those they serve.

Respectfully,

Kelly Boston, Chair

# Focus on Customers



## DVR Entry to Services Project

In January 2017, members of the WSRC contacted each DVR office in Washington state to assess the application experience for customers interested in DVR services. The goal of these calls was to gain first-hand knowledge of the customer experience regarding the timeliness and accessibility of the application process.

WSRC members asked staff in each office the following:

1. I'm thinking about applying for services, what do I do?
2. When do I sign an application?
3. How long from when I apply will I be served?

Overall, there were quite a few DVR offices that had a person who answered the phone and provided valuable information. There were numerous offices that offered a quick turnaround including meetings with counselors to start the process and applications within two weeks. Some comments noted that DVR staff were warm and positive.

There were three areas identified for improvement. First, having a person answer the phone when possible was desired. WSRC members also identified consistency of the entry process among offices and timeliness as concerns.

DVR utilized feedback from this project to move towards a consistent, proactive process of having staff answer phones. DVR conducted a deeper dive regarding the type of orientation (group, 1:1 etc.) and is implementing (as possible) a consistent practice. DVR is also aware of and moving towards timelines that capture a customer's readiness to engage in services and that exceed federal standards.

## Customer Satisfaction Survey

In 2016, the WSRC started conducting satisfaction surveys for DVR customers. As of September 2017, the WSRC had received enough surveys to consider the results valid and reliable.

Surveys are conducted with customers in four phases of the VR process: Eligibility, Plan, Closed–Employed, and Closed–Other. They are sent via U.S. mail. If the number of surveys returned in any month is low, WSRC staff call customers to conduct additional surveys by phone.

Individuals are asked to rate DVR services in the following categories using a five point Likert scale:

- My counselor does a good job keeping in touch with me.
- My counselor understands what is important to me.
- My counselor understands how my disability affects me.
- My counselor cares about my input.
- DVR moves quickly enough for me.
- Overall, I am satisfied with DVR.

Not surprisingly, individuals in the Closed–Employed phase express a higher level of satisfaction than those in the Closed–Other phase. The highest rated category is “My counselor cares about my input.” The lowest category is: “DVR moves quickly enough for me.” These highs and lows were consistent for individuals across all phases of the VR process.

Moving forward, the WSRC is working with DVR to transition the survey from a mail survey to an online survey. This will reduce the administrative cost and time it requires for staff to conduct surveys by phone. Next, WSRC members plan to report survey results by various demographic factors to learn if there are notable differences by geographic area, disability group, or other factors. It may also highlight areas where the WSRC may want to conduct a supplemental survey to learn more in-depth information about survey results of interest or concern.

## Customer Forums

The WSRC holds its regular quarterly meetings in various geographic locations in the state. As a part of each quarterly meeting, the Council conducts a DVR customer forum. The purpose of moving from community to community is to engage a broad representation of individuals receiving services from DVR and to hear their thoughts and feedback. Individuals with open cases throughout the geographic area receive an invitation to share their DVR experiences with Council members. DVR managers and supervisors are invited to the forums to hear the concerns and feedback that customers share about their local offices, and to connect with customers who need follow-up.

The Council documents trends and common issues to understand customer experiences that appear to be systemic or persistent. The forums also provide an opportunity for consumers experiencing issues to connect with VR staff or Client Assistance Program representatives to begin the process of discussion and resolution.

During 2017, the WSRC hosted customer forums in Tacoma, Everett, Pasco, and Sea Tac. Through these forums, the WSRC was able to engage and hear from 65 DVR customers. Throughout the state, there are common areas of strength and common areas of concern.

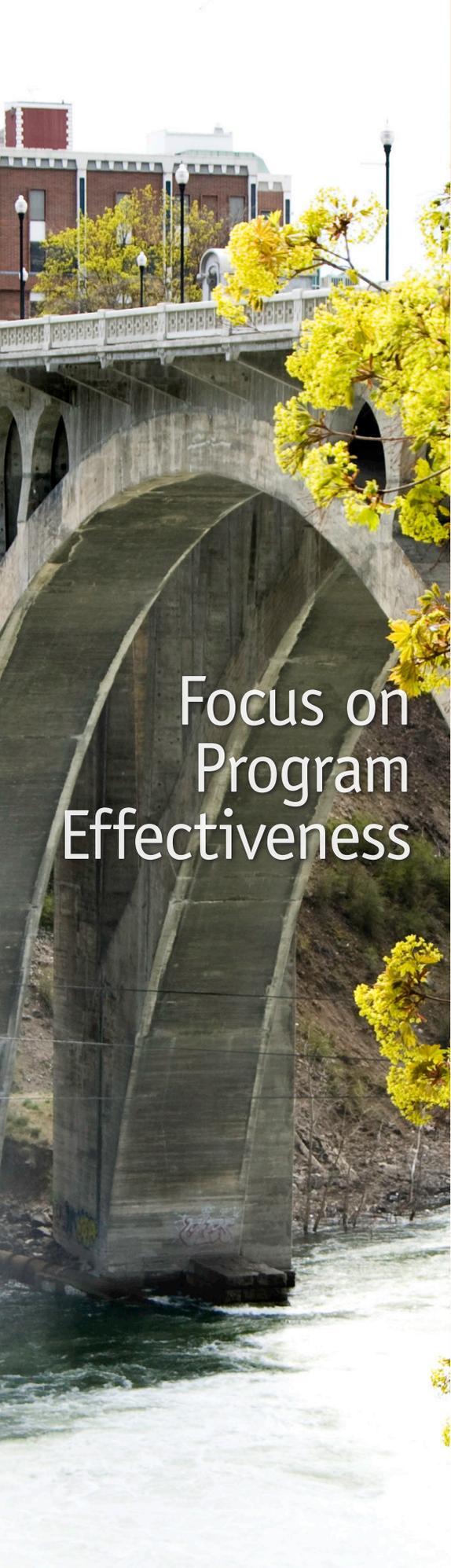
Customers frequently report the strength of the relationship with their counselor, and that their counselor cares about them and their input. Customers generally have positive feedback about how well their input and choices drive decisions related to IPE and job goals. Common concerns voiced during customer forums this year included an overall sense that they are not making significant or timely progress toward employment, and that there is a lack of responsiveness from DVR to customer contacts or requests for calls or appointments. These areas of concern are consistent with the results reported by customers on the WSRC satisfaction survey.

## Legislative Reception

The WSRC joins other disability groups in Washington every year during the legislative session to organize and host a legislative reception. In 2017, the reception was held on February 1 and marked the 36th Annual Legislative Reception.

The legislative reception, held at the State Capitol, is an informal event attended by more than 300 individuals with disabilities, advocates, and representatives of more than 50 organizations concerned with issues faced by people with disabilities and their families. Individuals have the opportunity to talk directly to their legislators and to advocate for legislation of interest to the disability community as a whole and to each individual personally.

The WSRC, Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment, and other advocacy organizations collaborate on collective priorities and develop talking points to help individuals communicate these priorities to their legislative representatives. In 2017, the event focused on the state budget as it relates to disability services and supports.



# Focus on Program Effectiveness



## How the WSRC Influences Program Improvements

One of the ways the WSRC influences DVR program improvements or addresses customer concerns is through the submission of formal recommendation to the Director of DVR. The Council's Executive Committee initiates and approves formal recommendations.

Usually, formal recommendations from the WSRC to DVR relate to an experience or concern shared by a number of DVR customers. It is common for these concerns to be reported in various areas of the state and/or to be reported over a period of time. Once the Council has collected sufficient documentation of an issue to understand the concern and its impact to DVR customers, a summary of the issue, along with a recommendation and/or request for action is prepared and forwarded to the DVR Director.

DVR responds to recommendations at a quarterly meeting or by submitting a written response addressing the issue. In addition, each State Plan or State Plan amendment contains a section that documents all recommendations made to DVR during the reporting period, and a DVR response summarizing how the recommendation was addressed.

## WSRC Submits Recommendation related to Customer Placements in Unsupervised Settings

At a 2017 Council meeting, a WSRC member who is a previous DVR customer shared an experience that the WSRC agreed needed immediate follow-up.

The member shared that while receiving DVR services, she was placed in a job where there was no oversight or supervision of the work team at the work site. For months, the individual's supervisor and other employees harassed and bullied her every day. Before long, she hated her job and hated going to work, but she didn't know what to do or how to get help. The member explained that she had reported the situation to her VR counselor. The counselor did not intervene and the harassment did not stop. Finally, after several months of tolerating the abusive treatment, the member gave up and quit.

After hearing about this experience, the Council asked DVR for information on policies, procedures, or training DVR had in place to protect DVR customers, particularly vulnerable or at risk individuals, who are placed in unsupervised settings with a provider or an employer. DVR responded by indicating that the only measures in place were a training requirement for all new DSHS employees related to mandatory reporting of any abuse they suspect and a general complaint procedure. While all DVR staff are mandatory reporters and the counselor involved in the case did have an obligation to intervene, the Council did not feel these measures adequately addressed the risk to DVR customers.

The WSRC submitted a formal recommendation to the Interim Director to take steps to address this risk, and included several strategies DVR could consider.

At the August Council meeting, DVR Director Rob Hines reported that in addition to the DSHS mandatory reporting training, DVR will expand training to address DVR-specific situations. DVR will include this training module as part of its core training for all staff. As DVR rolls out its new training program in 2018, all staff will complete this new training module.

## DVR Organizational Placement within DSHS

Prior to 2013, DVR reported directly to the DSHS Secretary's Office on the organizational chart. This was beneficial because it created more visibility, greater understanding, and more support for DVR among DSHS leaders. It also positioned DVR to ensure equal access to all disability groups, without giving preference, or appearing to give preference to any one group.

In 2013, DSHS reorganized the department and moved DVR under the Juvenile Justice and Rehabilitation Administration, later renamed Rehabilitation Administration. The WSRC voiced concerns to DSHS and has continued to advocate for reconsideration since 2013 based on the following key concerns related to this placement:

- DVR's core mission and statutory requirements are not well understood by DSHS leadership and it has not received meaningful leadership direction and support since 2013.
- DVR is submerged in an Administration that focuses on a single, non-disabled population, creating inequities, or perceived inequities in access and service delivery for all other groups of individuals with disabilities.
- DVR and programs in the Rehabilitation Administration do not utilize the same expertise, providers, or services. There are minimal opportunities to leverage expertise, resources, providers, etc. to benefit individuals served by these programs. At the same time, it distances DVR from disability and/or employment-related programs.

Leadership changes at all levels of DSHS and DVR in the last two years have made it difficult to advocate for change. Meanwhile, on February 18, 2016, Governor Inslee issued an Executive Order establishing the Washington State Blue Ribbon Commission on Delivery of Services to Children and Families. His Executive Order directed the Commission to recommend the organizational structure for a new department focused solely on children and families. That group recommended to the Legislature, and a bill passed in 2017, to create a new agency to serve children, youth, and families. Juvenile Rehabilitation programs will transition to this new agency in July 2019, with DVR remaining in DSHS. As a result, DSHS will need to reorganize programs impacted by this change, including DVR.

Cheryl Strange was appointed as new DSHS Secretary in October 2017. The WSRC and DVR have shared information with Secretary Strange about this long-standing issue and options for DVR placement. The WSRC and DVR have engaged the disability community, stakeholders, and others interested in this decision to hear and understand their thoughts and perspectives. We expect to make a joint DVR-WSRC recommendation to the DSHS Secretary before the end of 2017 based on the following goals:

1. Elevate DSHS understanding and commitment to disability services and programs by improving leadership visibility and engagement with DVR.
2. Equal access and equitable services to all people with disabilities.
3. Align DVR in a way that preserves the integrity of its purpose and enhances access to resources and expertise that improve outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

The recommendation supported by the WSRC, DVR, and the disability community is to restore DVR's organizational status to report directly to the DSHS Secretary's Office as soon as possible. While this remains the option of choice for placement within DSHS, stakeholder feedback and the Council's research on VR agency placement indicates that individuals with disabilities may achieve greater benefit from other DVR placement options in the future. We will continue efforts to explore options that best position DVR to assist individuals with disabilities achieve meaningful employment in Washington.

## WSRC Partners with DVR on Policy and Planning

### Order of Selection

In Spring 2017, the DVR Director informed the WSRC that it was beginning to study financial and caseload data to determine the need to enter an Order of Selection.

DVR ended its last Order of Selection in 2008, and there were few, if any, staff remaining in the State Office who had been involved in the previous planning and administration efforts. With a new DVR Director and a new Budget Manager, DVR reached out to the WSRC for assistance. The WSRC Chair was a member of the DVR leadership team throughout the prior order of selection period and was enlisted to assist current DVR staff to learn how to conduct the financial analysis, build forecasting and tracking tools, and develop a comprehensive plan to implement an order of selection.

The WSRC Chair guided the DVR team through a comprehensive financial and caseload analysis, and helped them build reports and forecasting tools that estimate caseload activity and related costs based on recent trends. Using this information and data, DVR decided that the order of selection would need to begin November 1, 2017. That gave DVR about five months to plan for the implementation.

The WSRC and DVR team worked to identify all activities that would need to be accomplished to implement an order of selection, including:

- Internal and external communication, including customers
- Policies and procedures
- Case management system changes
- Staff training
- State Plan update
- Case review and preparation

The WSRC also co-facilitated the public input process and provided input on the State Plan amendment related to the order of selection. While neither DVR nor the WSRC wants to implement order of selection, we understand the financial reality the Division faces and agree it is necessary. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to partner with DVR on this important implementation, and the resources and energy DVR expended to reduce the impact to customers to the greatest extent possible.

### Washington Administrative Code Updates

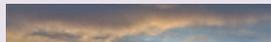
In Washington, public programs are required to codify program rules and requirements in Washington Administrative Code (WAC). The rules are expected to be clear and use plain language so that the general public, and DVR customers in particular, can easily understand program benefits and requirements.

DVR is working on a major update to the WAC chapter related to VR services to integrate WIOA and other program changes. The WSRC is partnering on all aspects of the WAC change. Through our input, we seek to ensure that rules do not create unnecessary barriers and delays for customers and that they retain the greatest flexibility possible to deliver individualized services. We also use our input to ensure rules are clear and understandable.

This partnership enables the WSRC to ensure customer needs and concerns are a focus, and it keeps members up to date with DVR rules and requirements. The WSRC members of the WAC review process are the Client Assistance Program (CAP) representative, the secondary education (OSPI) representative, a client advocate and former DVR participant, a Tribal VR representative, and a DVR Counselor Representative.



# Focus on System Improvements



## Barrier and Access Solutions Committee (BASC)

The WSRC has been preparing for the possible outcome of DVR entering into an Order of Selection for some time. As a result, the Council knew many individuals with disabilities who had typically been served by DVR would now receive employment services from other parts of the public workforce development system. Because of this, the WSRC made the strategic decision to increase its outreach and partnership to the rest of the public workforce development system; specifically focusing its advocacy efforts on ensuring individuals with disabilities were well served at Washington's WorkSource Centers.

One of the results of this advocacy was a leading role for the WSRC within the State Workforce Board's first standing committee. The goal of this committee is to create solutions to barriers experienced by job seekers in the public workforce development system. Teesha Kirschbaum, WSRC Executive Director, was named Co-Chair of this standing committee, the Barrier and Access Solutions Committee (BASC). Some of the highlights of BASC accomplishments in the last year include:

- Hearing and learning from job seekers with barriers to employment about their experiences within the public workforce development system. This includes the experiences of those that have first-hand experience using these services, and those who provide service and advocacy.
- Supporting the Employment Security Department with successful expansion of Wi-Fi access throughout WorkSource locations statewide. Wi-Fi access is the first step in supporting job seekers to bring their own tools/devices to a WorkSource Center and to engage in a job search. This facilitates access for many individuals with disabilities who rely on the use of their own assistive technology devices.

## Washington Delegation at the Swiss Model of Youth Apprenticeship Institute

Additional positive outcomes have resulted from the WSRC's decision to strengthen its partnerships with the Public Workforce Development system. In 2017, the Governor's Office and Microsoft Philanthropy partnered to send a delegation of Workforce Development professionals to attend an institute in Switzerland to learn about the Swiss Model of Youth Apprenticeship. The WSRC Executive Director was invited to join the delegation to learn how this system integrates and meets the needs of individuals with disabilities. The purpose of this trip was to gather information about the Swiss model to see what Washington State can do to increase career connected learning for all students.



# In Closing



The Washington State Rehabilitation Council achieved a number of objectives during 2017. We welcomed new members to achieve full membership, including a new DVR Director. These resources and positive relationships have positioned the Council to increase its presence and impact in 2018.

- A key concern that the Council invested considerable time and energy in addressing throughout 2017 – the organizational placement of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation – has a promising outlook for improvement in early 2018.
- The implementation of our customer satisfaction survey has been successful, and the Council is reporting valid, reliable results related to DVR customers' experience throughout the VR process. The Customer Satisfaction and Program Evaluation Committee is set to launch the planning for Phase 2 of the survey, expanding our ability to reach more customers and former customers.
- Council members engaged fully with DVR in the planning for order of selection, ensuring this planning included a strong element of customer communication and support. We will continue to listen to customers as the waiting list grows and to work with DVR to explore how to address needs and issues that arise under order of selection.
- We have expanded the Council's overall role and presence in the disability community. We make new connections every day that generate the support and advocacy needed to advance opportunities and equity for people with disabilities.
- We have played a leadership role in ensuring the full implementation of WIOA addresses barriers and access for people with disabilities.

We look forward to supporting and advising DVR as it strengthens its staff and programs to meet the challenges ahead and to maintaining a positive, collaborative partnership with DVR.