



## Our Members

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Spokane

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## State Plan Update Enhanced by Input

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) is updating the State Plan. The State Plan establishes the goals, priorities, and strategies which will guide service delivery through federal fiscal year 2013. All vocational rehabilitation programs seeking grant funds from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) must submit the State Plan before July 1. Grant funds allocated by RSA comprise roughly seventy-eight percent of DVR's budget.

The WSRC has led the effort to garner feedback on the State Plan update by facilitating the first two public forums in Tumwater and Spokane.

Tumwater forum participants discussed the need to maximize communication between DVR and its partners to foster trust

and avoid duplication of services. They also highlighted upcoming challenges preserving access to the extended supports needed to achieve supported employment rehabilitations.

Spokane forum participants discussed how best to support DVR's youngest customers to transition from high school to work. They also identified a need for more effective utilization of post employment services by customers who experience barriers created by psychiatric disabilities after being hired.

The final State Plan forum is June 1, from one to three in the afternoon, in the conference room at the DVR office located at:

20311-52<sup>nd</sup> Ave. W, Suite 200  
Lynnwood, WA 98036

The WSRC and DVR appreciate those who have offered input for strengthening the State Plan update.

## Excellence in Rehabilitation Evident in Bellingham and Mount Vernon

Looking for a good news story? Customers served in Bellingham and Mt. Vernon recently discussed the transformative impact of vocational rehabilitation services in their lives.

The WSRC invited 986 customers with open cases in Skagit and Whatcom Counties to our April 28<sup>th</sup> customer forum to seek feedback about their experiences with DVR. Twenty-two customers attended and spoke.

Speakers expressed not only satisfaction, but articulated particular ways that working with DVR was a catalyst for meaningful, positive change.

*Catherine Herring* and *Karen Hundahl* were singled out for praise by customers for their dedication during the rehabilitation process.

**See Excellence on pg. 2**



**DON'T MISS THE  
CHANCE TO  
OFFER  
YOUR TWO CENTS**

June 13<sup>th</sup> is the  
deadline for offering  
input on DVR's State  
Plan Update. Find the

Draft at:

[http://www.dshs.wa.gov/dvr/  
About/DraftStatePlan.aspx](http://www.dshs.wa.gov/dvr/About/DraftStatePlan.aspx)

Direct comments to  
Phyllis Hansen at:

[hansepa@dshs.wa.gov](mailto:hansepa@dshs.wa.gov)

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### Who Is Costing Who?

Usually when the conversation is about the “cost of disability” someone is talking about the cost to the government in terms of benefits, or the school, employers and business owners for the cost to them of providing accessibility or accommodations. I rarely hear anyone talk about the cost of disability – to the person with the disability.

I recently read an article about a young man, a quadriplegic who has Spinal Muscular Atrophy (SMA.) “John” as we will call him is an accomplished writer who makes his living as a professional blogger and successful entrepreneur.

One day John decided to add-up the annual cost of his disability; doctors, nurses, personal care attendants, medication etc. The total annual cost of keeping him alive was \$127,000. That did not include rent, food, utilities or the cost of purchasing, replacing, and repairing his motorized wheelchair, or the cost of his adapted wheelchair accessible van. John is fortunate however and does have private insurance, Medicaid and other government benefits. However, those come with a cost as well.

Because John is a talented writer he often earns in excess of \$5,000 per month. The government told John that he could keep only \$700 per month to live on. Any money that he made in excess of that had to go

### Excellence. *continued from pg. 1*

One speaker said of Catherine, “At first I thought she was making me jump through rings of fire... then I started to succeed. There is no one like her.” While nobody is exactly like Catherine, her Bellingham colleagues are also highly regarded.

Like Bellingham, the Mt. Vernon staff stands out for what they achieve. The office serves customers in a wide geographic area which includes Island County, with just three counselors. The Mount Vernon staff recognizes a need to increase capacity to provide culturally competent outreach and services to Spanish speaking customers. Spanish speakers are a significant

and growing demographic within Skagit County. This may be accomplished when the hiring process for a new counselor concludes.

The WSRC doesn't know what accounts for the positive energy and results in the Northwest corner of the state. It might be particular staff or their skills. It could be effective supervision or a combination of factors. Whatever the root causes, we recognize something is working. Our members encourage DVR leaders to take a closer look at local dynamics to see if the practices are replicable. DVR's team in Northwest Washington is confident, skilled, and committed.

### SPOTLIGHT- WSRC Welcomes Leaders from Three Tribal VR Programs

There are barriers to employment, and then there are **BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT**. Imagine you are a new VR counselor. You have access to only a fraction of the budget you need to serve your customers. Your funding is available for five years. It may or may not be renewed.

Consider your new caseload composition. More than forty percent of your customers dropped out before middle school. They also experience grinding levels of intergenerational poverty. Of course they also have disabilities. Some customers' families are divided by international borders. The average unemployment rate in your community is fifty percent.

Do these circumstances sound daunting? They are. These are the realities facing counselors in the eight Tribal VR programs operating in Washington State.

On April 29<sup>th</sup> the WSRC was joined by a panel of Tribal VR leaders from the Lummi Nation's Vocational Rehabilitation Program, the North Intertribal VR program, and the Colville Confederated Tribes VR program, who illuminated the issues faced by the customers they serve.

The panelists highlighted challenges, but also focused on the strengths of a service model that allows them to serve people (and in some cases their families) holistically.

**See leaders on pg. 3**

### Next WSRC Meeting

July 21 and 22 in Tacoma  
1515 Commerce St.  
Tacoma, WA 98402  
Please contact JoAnne Lang for reasonable accommodation or more information at:  
langjk@dshs.wa.gov

### DID YOU KNOW...

There are 29 federally recognized tribes in Washington State.

There are now 73 Tribal VR programs nationally, 8 operate in Washington State.

Tribal VR programs have been funded under the Rehab Act since 1978. Funding is available for 5 years then tribes must reapply.

In 2008, at least 23.3% of Native Americans in our state have disabilities.

**Splinters from the Chair**  
*Continued...*

back to paying for the cost of his medical expenses or else he would be cut off. John did not want to live in a ratty apartment at a sub-poverty level. He wanted to be able to take care of himself and his family instead of them having to take care of him. But, no matter how he played with the numbers he couldn't make it work. He decided the cost – to him was too high. So, one day he did something crazy...

**To Be Continued**



**Leaders, *continued from pg. 2***

Tribal VR programs can support customers to participate in spiritual ceremonies and other cultural activities that DVR cannot pay for.

Our guests highlighted multiple tribal cultures, languages, religious beliefs, and attitudes about people with disabilities. In some tribal communities people with apparent disabilities are supported by family and less encouraged to engage in broader community activities. That is beginning to change. For example, a new group of people with disabilities is coming together at the Lummi Nation. They are openly identifying as people with disabilities.

Unlike the general community of people with disabilities in Washington State, in Native American communities those with less apparent disabilities

are more likely to be in leadership positions.

Given the scale and complexity of the barriers Tribal VR customers face, collaboration with a range of partners and resources, including DVR is critical. Panelists from Bellingham expressed having a good relationship with DVR, but encourage ongoing communication.

Developing and sustaining mutual respect in the collaborations between Tribal VR programs and DVR is important to the success of co-enrolled customers. Typically, DVR staff has more formal education than Tribal VR counselors do. Tribal VR counselors frequently possess relationships and cultural fluency. The skills of each partner strengthen the customers' rehabilitation process.

The WSRC thanks our guests. We appreciate the work of Tribal Vocational Rehabilitation programs at: Colville, Chehalis, Cowlitz, Lummi, Samish, Yakama, North Intertribal VR and South Puget Intertribal Planning Agency.

**DID YOU KNOW...**

**Native Americans are 1.5% of the population in the state.**

**In 2005 the average Washington State unemployment rate was 5.5%, while the average rate for Native Americans in our state was 50%.**

**From 2007-2008 the high school dropout rate for all Washington students was 21.4%. For Native American students it was 40.8%**



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**COMING STRAIGHT TO YOU  
QUARTERLY  
FROM CYBERSPACE**