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DVR Rolls Out Plan for Spending ARRA Funds

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) has been awarded 8.8 million dollars in federal stimulus funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA). Unlike the federal match that DVR receives from the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) through a grant allocation each federal fiscal year, this money is unsolicited and one-time-only. The intent of ARRA money is to jumpstart spending and to create jobs, transparently and quickly. ARRA funds must be spent by December 31, 2010. ARRA requires DVR to provide quarterly, outcome-based reports to federal partners enumerating how many jobs were saved or created with the funds. The DVR Senior Leadership Team has opted to use the money to put 1,000 eligible, job ready customers to work. These rehabilitations will be in addition to previously established targets developed for each office. Within DVR there is a mix of high expectations, practical questions, and a desire for clarity about the intention, structure, and implementation of ARRA funded projects.

DVR's Senior Leadership team has developed *Project HIRE* targeting

eligible, employment ready job seekers with disabilities (who do not need the full palate DVR services) for accelerated job placement. DVR envisions that customers participating in Project H.I.R.E will secure placements working in high demand fields such as healthcare, information technology, manufacturing, aerospace, energy or other sectors featuring green jobs. DVR expects customers served through Project H.I.R.E to work thirty-five hours a week or more, to receive healthcare and other benefits, and to come closer to earning a living wage (which differs depending on which county the customer lives in). Between now and mid January of 2010, DVR projects that two hundred customers will have achieved successful placements through Project H.I.R.E.

How does DVR propose to achieve these outcomes in a short timeframe? It has established contracts totaling 2.1 million dollars to date across the state with partners at Community and Technical Colleges, community-based organizations, Workforce Development Councils, and WorkSource partners. Contract partners will work in teams which will include DVR staff in each



Project H.I.R.E. targets DVR eligible customers who are job ready to:

Work in high demand fields such as healthcare, aerospace, manufacturing, and energy;

For 35 hours a week or more;

Receiving healthcare benefits;

Earning \$15 per hour (depending on where they reside).

DVR is projecting it will support 1,000 additional customers to go to work (beyond the targets established for each office) before the deadline for spending funds from the American Reinvestment & Recovery Act passes on December 31, 2010.



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DVR Has Awarded Contracts Totaling 2.1 Million To:

- Community-Minded Enterprises;
- The Hearing Speech & Deafness Center;
- Bellevue College;
- Columbia Basin College;
- Edmonds Community College;
- Benton Franklin Workforce Development Council;
- Pacific Mountain Workforce Development Council;
- Seattle King County Workforce Development Council;
- Spokane Workforce Development Council;
- Snohomish Workforce Development Council;
- and the Southwest Washington Workforce Development Council.

contract area. The contracts were established in two amounts, one hundred thousand dollars or two hundred thousand dollars. Contractors in receipt of two hundred thousand dollars will agree to serve thirty customers, those who receive half as much will serve half as many. DVR anticipates a rehabilitation rate of 73.3% for Project H.I.R.E.

The point person within DVR for Project H.I.R.E. is Peg Evans-Brown. Evans-Brown has extensive experience in the field and also managed the Mount Vernon office before coming to the state office as a program manager in the Field Services Unit. With regard to the ambitious aims for Project H.I.R.E Evans-Brown says:

“When Federal partners introduced the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act they emphasized innovation and a desire to move towards a green economy. Washington DVR has seized that opportunity to be innovative by helping people get to work using a model inspired by Projects with Industry.”

Everyone with a stake in the success of the VR system or its customers can get behind the outcomes DVR hopes to achieve with ARRA funds. Where opinions diverge is about how DVR

should go about pursuing those expectations. A confluence of factors and timing curbed the ability of the Senior Leadership Team to share as much information as they wanted to about their vision for the project. With the lack of information skepticism grew. DVR is working to fill the information void. Recently a desk reference about the project was released, more discussions are happening at an office level, and the contractors are beginning to get the ball rolling. Contractors will be providing data to DVR frequently and DVR staff participating on contracting teams will play an integral role in the implementation of Project H.I.R.E.

As DVR evaluates the early outcomes in the first phase of contracting, those who achieve the goals that have been established will be eligible to apply for the next phase of contracts in December of this year. Those who do not will not have that opportunity.

The first contracts will focus, in part on creating green jobs in Spokane. The October meeting of the WSRC will be held in Spokane. WSRC members directed Council staff to extend invitations to members of the contracting team to join us at our October 23rd meeting. Council members want to know more about how the first phase of implementation is progressing. Meeting with the Spokane team is part of our ongoing effort to follow how Project H.I.R.E develops.



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Who Can Answer Questions About ARRA funded Projects?

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WSRC Meets
Oct. 22-23
Spokane
Doubletree City
Center

We're on the Web!

Visit us at:

www.wastrehabcouncil.org

Vancouver Stakeholders Provide Input

WSRC members held another successful customer forum on July 16th in Vancouver. Thirty members of the public attended and were joined by Council members as well as DVR staffers. As is always the case there was a mix of successes, frustrations, bottlenecks, and confusion expressed.

Paul St. James came specifically to share his success and appreciation for the guidance and counseling he received from Susan, a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor working in Vancouver. Mr. St. James had a long rehabilitation process that began in the state of California. Recently he achieved a successful rehabilitation after being hired following an internship as an accountant.

Several comments addressed the general length of the VR process, particularly the assessment phase. Some speakers found that assessments weakened, rather than built confidence. The general consensus of the audience was that the assessment phase was frequently repetitive. The suggested change was to encourage DVR to work collaboratively with other systems which have already conducted assessments to make the most of existing information and disclosure where possible.

Debbie, of Skamania County commented on the challenges she faced accessing services and job opportunities in her rural community.

Jaques, the parent of an adult son with a developmental disability working with DVR commented:

"I am fairly proactive, but our relationship is more with the employment provider we selected than with DVR directly. My suggestion is that as part of the intake process, when someone comes to DVR they get more information about the services that DVR actually provides."

Paul St. James captured the purpose of the gathering when he said:

"You know advocacy is a nationwide [challenge] and it is us bringing it to people's attention that really does help. Doing what we are doing here, showing up to these meetings and giving our input gives people the feedback they need."

The Council is looking forward to receiving more feedback from the public on October 22nd during the next customer forum in Spokane.

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**COMING STRAIGHT TO YOU
QUARTERLY
FROM CYBERSPACE**