From the Director

Vocational rehabilitation produces significant economic benefits

Donna Ashworth
Acting Director

Besides paying for itself, West Virginia’s public vocational rehabilitation program contributes to the economy in three ways.

Vocational rehabilitation services increase the current and potential earnings of West Virginians with disabilities.

Post-vocational rehabilitation earnings produce increased tax revenues for state and federal governments.

Consumers with disabilities who are vocationally rehabilitated become more financially independent, resulting in reduced Social Security benefit payments (SSI and SSDI).

It’s a nearly perfect example of the old adage, “Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.”

Two studies recently published in peer-reviewed journals show how much the vocational rehabilitation program contributes to the state’s economic well-being. The Division of Rehabilitation Services, the federally designated vocational rehabilitation program for West Virginia, provides services to eligible people with disabilities to help them get or maintain employment that leads to economic independence.

The first study, “Economic Impacts of West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services on Consumers with Significant Disabilities: Realistic Return-on-Investment Models for State-Federal VR Programs,” was published in the Journal continued on next page
Vocational Rehabilitation Return on Investment

of Rehabilitation (Volume 77, Number 3). The study developed conservative, practical three-year streamlined and inclusive return-on-investment models. The streamlined model uses the vocational rehabilitation consumer’s wages, while the inclusive model incorporates federal and state tax revenue as well as Social Security savings.

The second study, “Estimating Work Life Return on Investment of WVDRS Youth and Older Consumers with Significant Disabilities,” was recently published in the Journal of Rehabilitation Administration (Volume 35, Number 1). This research expands on the streamlined return-on-investment model developed in the first study to include not only the consumer’s first three years of wages, but the potential work life earnings for those who receive public vocational rehabilitation services.

Based on the most conservative streamlined model, every vocational rehabilitation dollar spent in West Virginia results in an immediate return on investment of $1.86 just one year after an individual receives services. Three years after receiving services, the return on investment increases to $5.51.

When projecting the future earnings of vocational rehabilitation consumers over their work life, the anticipated return on investment increases to $19.42 for youth (ages 16-24) who received services from the Division of Rehabilitation Services. The return on investment for an older consumer with a disability receiving services is $13.39.

These numbers may surprise some people, but they simply confirm what many in this field have known for a long time. This is as close to a “sure thing” as any investment you’ll ever see.

The two studies above were produced by the Division’s State Plan and Program Evaluation Unit, which developed new methods to calculate the efficiency and overall return on investment for the public vocational rehabilitation program. Looking first to the federal requirements to measure gains in competitive employment, the Division took the initiative to assess the broader economic impact of empowering West Virginians with disabilities to gain or maintain employment.

The Division of Rehabilitation Services is pleased to demonstrate that West Virginia’s public vocational rehabilitation program is an efficient and accountable economic development program with a tremendous positive impact for all West Virginians.
Statewide training to improve case management

In our daily work tasks, we have to make lots of decisions. How do you make the important decisions in case management from the first meeting with a client to the ultimate ending point when a case is closed?

That was the topic of recent training for DRS vocational rehabilitation counselors, rehabilitation services associates, branch office managers and district managers.

“Decision Tree” training was conducted during the months of Oct. through Dec., 2011 by DRS Field Services managers and members of the DRS Quality Assurance Unit.

“We want to provide our rehabilitation professionals with the resources they need to do their jobs,” said DRS Acting Director Donna Ashworth. “Decision trees are powerful support tools. In making decisions, we have to consider the rules which govern the way we do business, as well as the many other factors that can influence the potential consequences of our decisions.”

Training sessions were held in each of DRS’ six districts throughout the state. District employees worked together in small groups with mock cases to address all aspects of case management decisions that occur throughout the rehabilitation process, including interviewing, requesting records and comprehensive assessments.

Training topics included communicating with clients, determining eligibility, functional limitations and impediments to employment, transferable skills and selecting vocational goals.

Smoke alarms for people who are deaf or hearing impaired to be made available

Through a grant from the Division of Rehabilitation Services, the West Virginia Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) and the West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (WVCDHH) will provide free smoke alarms to individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The SILC and WVCDHH will be working with the State Fire Marshal’s office and the WV Association for the Deaf to set up and promote this program.

Individuals in need of this equipment will apply through the WVCDHH. Once an application is submitted, the individual’s home will be assessed to determine what type(s) of alarm(s) are needed. Three types of alarms will be available:

1. A standard smoke alarm that sends an extra loud warning when fire danger is sensed.

2. An alarm clock with a monitor that is programmed to “hear” the standard smoke alarm. When the standard alarm sounds, the alarm clock initiates three different signals designed to awaken and alert a sleeping person who is deaf or hard of hearing: a special square-wave alarm sounds, which by design is more likely to be heard by a person with hearing loss; an attached bed-shaker vibrates to provide a tactile signal; and the clock display flashes the word FIRE.

3. An alarm that produces an extra loud warning and has a strobe light, providing visual notification of danger from multiple locations in the home.

Individual needs will be considered in determining the type and number of alarms a person will receive.

For more information and/or to submit an application, contact the West Virginia Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing at 304-558-1675, 877-461-3578 or by video phone at 304-553-7384.
"If you build it, they will come."

That was the message received by Ray Kinsella from a mystery voice in the movie, Field of Dreams, which prompted Kinsella, the movie’s main character, to plow under his corn crop and build a baseball field in Iowa.

Gateway Industries, Inc., located in Ronceverte, received a similar message in writing from its long-standing partner, Four-JAKS, Inc., a manufacturing business in Lewisburg. Four-JAKS wasn’t talking about a baseball field, but everyone is still buzzing with excitement.

Four-JAKS specializes in manufacturing window parts and was looking to move its entire assembly operation into a consolidated location to cut costs and stay competitive.

Gateway Industries, a community rehabilitation program, has served people with disabilities for more than 30 years. Throughout its history, Gateway has been considered a sheltered workshop, but its leadership has always seen the need to adapt in order to sustain itself.

According to Phyllis Cantrell, Executive Director of Gateway Industries, she and her staff, as well as Gateway board members, are very involved in the community. They believe that helping to build community businesses will help them build their business.

One of Gateway’s first jobs was to sort the good cardboard soda pop cartons from the bad so they could be reused by bottling companies, explained Cantrell.

For the last 20 years, Gateway has held government contracts with the General Services Administration and the Department of Defense to supply impermeable laboratory aprons, painter’s plastic drop cloths, vinyl kitchen aprons and stainless steel framed mirrors.

Gateway has partnered with Four-JAKS for the last 15 years, providing assembly work and warehousing and distribution services for the company. According to Cantrell, as part of its sheltered workshop component, Gateway assembles some window parts for Four-JAKS, including a balance which allows a window to tilt out so that it can be cleaned.

During this 30-year history, Gateway has been a partner of the Division of Rehabilitation Services, providing services to DRS clients including assessment of work potential, training to develop satisfactory work behaviors and skills for either sheltered employment or work in the community.

For the last several years, DRS has provided grant opportunities to encourage community rehabilitation programs to expand beyond existing sheltered workshop components in order to provide greater access to community-based services, as well as integrated employment opportunities for DRS clients.

In 2009, Gateway took advantage of grant funding from DRS and developed life skills training and job development programs that have benefited several DRS clients.

But, according to Harry Bostic, Rehabilitation Program Specialist, DRS was still encouraging Gateway to apply for additional DRS grant funding to develop an integrated worksite so that DRS clients could be placed there and considered a successful employment outcome. Changes to federal regulations in 2001 altered the definition of employment outcome, thus preventing state vocational rehabilitation agencies from considering a sheltered workshop as a successful job placement.

According to Cantrell, Gateway’s board of directors was thinking of expanding. They jumped on the chance to purchase a vacant lot next to Gateway’s existing location a couple of years ago.

“If you build it, they will come.” That was the idea that started taking shape and getting everyone excited.

Four-JAKS was looking for a building to consolidate its operations. Gateway wanted to use its recent land purchase to grow its business.

Gateway and Four-JAKS began talking about how they could enhance their existing partnership.

Four-JAKS is the new tenant of the 10,200 square-foot building that Gateway decided to
build, utilizing DRS grant funds, a bank loan and other donations. Built on the vacant lot, it connects to Gateway’s existing structure.

In this new location, Four-JAKS will do most of its production work, moving its equipment and current employees into the location.

But perhaps the best thing to come out of this is the opportunities for people with disabilities.

The goal is to use this location to provide pre-employment assessments and training for DRS clients that will ultimately lead to employment for some.

“This partnership creates a fully integrated work setting that will benefit our clients and facilitate their assimilation into the workforce in the community,” said Cantrell. “Job development services will be provided to people with disabilities alongside of people who don’t have disabilities.”

Nancy Harris, DRS Rehabilitation Counselor, works closely with Gateway Industries as a service provider for many of her clients. According to Harris, Gateway has always been an invaluable partner.

“Because Gateway started out as a sheltered workshop and has retained the workshop as a continuing part of their program, they can help our clients develop positive work behaviors while performing real production work in an instructive, nurturing and tolerant environment, prior to entering an integrated community work environment,” says Harris. “By the time they take that step, they are ready, they are mature workers, and they are more likely to experience success.”

Harris believes this new initiative will be an excellent opportunity for some of her clients. “Production work requires good finger and manual dexterity, good visual perception, attention to detail, and tolerance for repetitive work. For some, it is a means by which to learn about the expectations of the world of work … For others, it turns out to be their forte.”

Ultimately, this partnership and this new building will be a home run, facilitating successful vocational rehabilitation services and employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

Photos of new building are on page 8.

continued on next page
Education and the Arts Cabinet Secretary Kay Goodwin launched the food court’s opening, explaining why the location is so important to the program. “With its centralized location in the heart of West Virginia’s seat of government, the Capitol Food Court is here to serve our Legislature, our Supreme Court, our state employees and anyone visiting our magnificent State Capitol building,” said Goodwin.

Terry Arthur, a licensed Randolph-Sheppard program vendor, manages the operation of the food court. Arthur’s goal is to provide high quality and tasty food at reasonable prices with friendly customer service.

The Capitol Food Court features new menu items, including Uno’s pizzas and flatbread sandwiches and Dunkin' Donuts coffees, along with a more traditional snack bar menu.

Authorized by Congress in 1936, the Randolph-Sheppard Act created this self-employment program for qualified individuals who are legally blind, providing opportunities to operate vending facilities on federal, state and governmental properties. Licensed vendors may work in a variety of settings including vending machine routes, snack bars or cafeterias. The federal law was co-sponsored by Jennings Randolph, then a U.S. representative and later an influential senator from West Virginia.

“The primary goal of this program is to provide work opportunities,” Ward said. “An important secondary goal is to enhance public understanding of blindness for those who interact with our vendors.”

DRS provides training, licensure, equipment and initial inventory for each Randolph-Sheppard vendor. Each of the program’s vendors is a self-employed business owner and manager.

Our goal is to reach out to anyone and everyone who may need vocational rehabilitation services.”
The National Federation of the Blind of West Virginia will be promoting Braille literacy across the state using grant funding from the Division of Rehabilitation Services. Funding will be used to develop a pilot Braille peer tutoring program.

The ability to read and write Braille is an important tool for people who are blind, helping to achieve independence, self-confidence and productive gainful employment.

The pilot program will utilize a small group of volunteer peer tutors to work with a comparably small group of volunteer students during a limited period of time. Working on such a small scale, the project will attempt to identify the most effective organizational and instructional strategies for developing a Braille peer tutoring program on a larger and more permanent basis.

Each volunteer peer tutor is literate in Braille and uses it on a daily basis; however, they are not trained instructors. A training workshop will be held to help familiarize the volunteers with some of the most effective instructional tools and practices for teaching Braille.

The ultimate goal of the pilot program is to determine whether a volunteer-based Braille peer tutoring program can work on a long-term basis in the state.

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**Braille literacy Facts**

- Studies show that Braille is an efficient and effective reading medium.
- Braille reading speed can exceed 200 words per minute.
- Fewer than 10 percent of the 1.3 million people who are legally blind in the United States are Braille readers.
- Only 10 percent of blind children are learning Braille.
- Each year as many as 75,000 people lose all or part of their vision.

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**New online payment information system brings cost savings and greater efficiency**

Providers of case services now have instant access to payment information after they’ve billed the West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services, thanks to a new online system.

The secure online Explanation of Benefits (EOB) system is available to all vendors who provide case services to the Field Services and Disability Determination programs, according to DRS’ Chief Financial Officer Michelle James.

James expects the EOB system to improve efficiency and reduce costs for DRS and for its case service vendors, who can access the new system free at www.appsf.wv.gov/Rehab/EOB.

The new online service was developed at no cost to DRS through the state’s self-funded electronic government program, WV.gov.

“Our goal with the new online system is to streamline the reconciliation process for our case service vendors,” James said. “Vendors can now easily log on to the EOB system and get the information they need in seconds, which saves them a telephone call to staff in our fiscal office.”
Gateway Industries: Two trucks can load or unload materials at the loading dock (left). A smaller loading dock is at the opposite corner of the building. See article on page 4.

Gateway Industries: The professionally sealed concrete floor is ready for equipment to be moved in during April.

VocRehab Perspective publication information

The VocRehab Perspective is a publication of the West Virginia Division of Rehabilitation Services. Questions and comments may be directed to Tracy Carr, Senior Manager of governmental and public relations.

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