

# VR AND SRC

OUR FOCUS IS SUCCESS IN  
CHANGING ECONOMIC TIMES



PROVIDING LEADERSHIP ON BEHALF OF PERSONS WITH  
DISABILITIES AND GUIDANCE TO VOCATIONAL  
REHABILITATION PROGRAMS

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL  
ANNUAL REPORT  
2010

Goals and Priorities of the Division of Rehabilitation Services for Fiscal Year 2011, as developed and agreed to by the Division of Rehabilitation Services and the State Rehabilitation Council

- Provide services to approximately 30,000 individuals.
- Achieve successful outcomes for at least 1,907 individuals with disabilities.
- At least 92% of individuals served and closed with successful employment outcomes will be individuals with significant disabilities.
- The success rate for individuals determined eligible and receiving services will be at least 56%.
- Achieve a 96% or higher satisfaction rating for the vocational rehabilitation program as reported by the consumer satisfaction survey program for successful outcome closures.

CHAIR



Kim Williams

Soddy Daisy, TN

Business, Industry and Labor Representative

VICE CHAIR



Rozann Downing

Big Sandy, TN

Business, Industry and Labor Representative

SECRETARY



Karen Harrison

Greeneville, TN

Parent Training and Information Center  
Representative

## 2010 STATISTICS

- New Applications = 8,393
- Total number of people with disabilities served = 29,747
- Number of persons obtaining employment/closed successfully = 1,651
- Annualized earnings before rehabilitation = \$2,999,880
- Annualized earnings after rehabilitation = \$24,293,776
- Net earnings increase = \$21,293,896
- Success rate = 47.8%
- Tennessee Business Enterprise (TBE) Program operates 141 vending facilities generating over \$22.5 million in sales and producing an average net income per blind vendor of approximately \$62,009.

## ***SUCCESS STORY – Hope E. Betcke***

Please extend congratulations to Teresa Kirk, Region 1, for her winning Case of the Quarter nomination of Hope E. Betcke. The members of the Staff Advisory Council have chosen it as the winner for the October-December, 2009 quarter. Ms. Betcke's story demonstrates how individual drive and determination, paired with appropriate supports, can beat what some might consider insurmountable odds.

Ms. Betcke encountered many personal and physical challenges by the time she came to the DRS office. Teresa, through good counseling and guidance, demonstrated an understanding of the emotional strain and negative experiences Ms. Betcke had encountered. Teresa was instrumental in getting the necessary mental health services Ms. Betcke needed in order to benefit from DRS. With multiple DRS services, she was able to grow personally, gain work skills and become more self-confident in her ability to work.

The SAC is impressed by Ms. Betcke's understanding of her own strengths and what skills and supports she needed for successful employment. She benefitted from work adjustment and job readiness training at Goodwill Industries, job placement at the Greeneville TRC, WRIP, and additional supports to gain skills in specialized coding and billing associated with her current employment as an administrative assistant.

Also involved with Ms. Betcke's success were Mary Babb, DRS Employment Counselor; Teresa Smith, Corporate Connections; Amy Rader, WRIP contract; and, Irene Scales, Secretary. A great team effort, indeed!

This case will be one of the entries for Case of the Year in the fall. The SAC appreciates the excellent work of this team and for the very well written nomination.



Mark Montgomery, FY2011 Chair  
Nashville, TN  
Statewide Independent Living Council



Kim Williams, FY2011 Vice Chair  
Soddy Daisy, TN  
Business, Industry and Labor  
Representative



Jean Saulsberry, FY2011 Secretary  
Memphis, TN  
Business, Industry and Labor Representative



Samuel Cole  
Nashville, TN  
Liason

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- The SRC collaborated with the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) to complete and submit the approved FY 2011 Title I, Part B State Plan.
- The SRC and DRS submitted nominations for SRC members to the Governor, and appointments were always made in a timely manner. There are no vacancies on the SRC.
- The SRC worked with DRS to release 1,819 priority category 2 cases from the waiting list.
- The SRC held its annual in-service training on June 21, 2010 at the DoubleTree Hotel in Nashville.
- A representative of the SRC attended all Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation Conferences during FY 2010.
- A representative of the SRC attended all National Council of State Agencies for the Blind Conferences during FY 2010.
- Four (4) quarterly SRC meetings were held and appropriate public notices given.
- SRC and DRS continue to hold the Middle Tennessee state plan public hearing during the annual Tennessee Disability Mega Conference.
- SRC prepared the FY 2010 resource plan that was approved by the DSU.
- SRC collaborated with the DSU to revise the VR policy manual. Revisions to the policy manual are ongoing.



Tricia Griggs – Nashville, TN  
Client Assistant Program  
Representative



Maria Ramirez – Nashville, TN  
Vocational Rehabilitation  
Recipient  
Representative



John Majors – Nashville, TN  
Workforce Investment Board  
Representative



Steve Sparks – Nashville, TN  
State Education Agency  
Representative



Sherry Hill – Humboldt, TN  
Vocational Rehabilitation  
Counselor  
Representative



Norris Branick  
Jackson, TN  
Former Vocational  
Rehabilitation Recipient  
Representative



Raymond Edward Neal –  
Hendersonville, TN  
Disability Advocacy Group  
Representative



Jody Ray Shaw  
Madison, TN  
Disability Advocacy Group  
Representative

## DEAF-BLIND SERVICES OF TENNESSEE

The Division of Rehabilitation Services in recent years has seen a tiny specialized program emerge as a national example for providing VR services to individuals with both vision and hearing loss. The Division recognizes that the communication, mobility, and training needs of people who have dual sensory losses can be quite varied. The vocational rehabilitation experience for persons who are Deaf-Blind are unique. For this reason, the Division established specialized services to address the needs of individuals who have a combined sensory loss. The primary goal of the program is to better prepare staff to understand the unique needs of this growing population so they can improve the likelihood of success in achieving a successful vocational outcome.

The Program Coordinator for Deaf-Blind services in Tennessee is Lana Newton. Mrs. Newton has a Master's degree in counseling with a focus on Deafness, is a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor, and has a certificate in Deaf-Blindness from Northern Illinois University and the Helen Keller National Center. One of Mrs. Newton's first challenges was to find the people who were Deaf-Blind. Tennessee maintains a Deaf-Blind Registry and when Mrs. Newton took the job less than three years ago, there were 143 individuals on the Tennessee Deaf-Blind Register. That number has mushroomed to almost 500 at the close of 2010. Although many on the Register are not VR eligible clients, more and more are being integrated into the VR Program which will ultimately result in more people who are Deaf-Blind going to work.

The next challenge was to train our VR staff in the field so they would be better equipped to serve this population. Mrs. Newton has participated in statewide training programs for field staff and has also traveled the state providing staff training on the local level. Even though Mrs. Newton doesn't handle the cases, she is a resource to the VR Counselor and is always available to consult on difficult clients.

One of the important aspects of coordinating services for individuals who are Deaf-Blind is the ability to network and form partnerships with private non-profits groups, community resources and other state and federal programs across the state. Ms. Newton has increased VR's visibility in this regard and continues to build partnerships with community providers.

Working with consumer groups is also a key to the success of the program. There are two consumer groups in our state whose focus is to advocate for people who are Deaf-Blind. The Tennessee Organization of the Deaf-Blind the Tennessee Association of the Deaf-Blind are both active organizations and both work closely with the Division to promote services and successful outcomes. The outstanding working relationships with both consumer groups has help add to the growing number of referrals in our state.

The Division also works in partnership with the TN Deaf-Blind Project (TREDS) at Vanderbilt University to help identify children up to age 21 who are Deaf-Blind. TREDS and TN DRS Deaf-Blind Services' staff help provide resources for transition age teens and their families to become more familiar with the VR programs as they begin to access adult services.

The Helen Keller National Center (HKNC) is the only comprehensive training center in the United States which provides specialized services exclusively to youth and adults with combined vision and hearing loss. Strong alliances have been formed with HKNC and our state to better identify the Deaf-Blind population in Tennessee and offer the HKNC and TN DRS training and resources to Tennessee residents.

In April 2010 a statewide learning retreat was held in Tennessee. Over one hundred volunteers came together to make it possible for 26 people who were Deaf-Blind to learn about new technology, employment opportunities, gain new advocacy and independent living skills, and explore new communication and mobility techniques. The Division partnered with the Helen Keller National Center, ViITAL Center for the Blind, Partnership Services for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Tennessee Association of the Deaf, Hearing Loss Association of America, Tennessee Temple University Interpreter Training Program, Tri-State Resource and Advocacy Center, Chattanooga Parks and Recreation, Hamilton County Lions Sight Services Association, and many other local groups.

The Division is proud of its Deaf-Blind Program. For more information, email Lana Newton at: [лана.newton@tn.gov](mailto:лана.newton@tn.gov) or call 423-634-6706 voice phone or 423-208-9058 videophone.

# SRC – Who We Are

## ABOUT SRC

The State Rehabilitation Council provides oversight and advice on the operations of the VR program after consulting with the State Workforce Investment Board. Council members are appointed by the Governor and represent a broad range of individuals with disabilities and organizations interested in individuals with disabilities. Many of the council members are also citizens with disabilities. The SRC, which convenes quarterly, provides input into development of the State Plan for the VR program. With annual updates, the State Plan focuses on the use of innovative means for achieving long-term success in expanding and improving vocational rehabilitation services. The SRC also coordinates with other councils within the state, assists with public forums, and prepares an annual report to the Governor.

## CSANC – Consumers Satisfaction and Needs Committee

- Reviewed Statewide Needs Assessment with DRS to access the results that established the goals for the State Plan 2011.
- Collaborated with DRS to improve the consumer satisfaction survey for the upcoming year.
- Organized CSNAC Committee Members to develop and implement Focus Groups to be conducted January-February 2011.

## SPARC – State Plan and Report Committee

- Participated in statewide public hearings on the FY 2011 Title I, Part B State Plan
- Distributed council appointment information and received increased consumer/public participation in the SRC nomination process
- Preparation of Annual Report with the DRS
- Attended CSAVR and NCSAB meetings

## OPRA– Outreach Public Relation and Awareness Committee

- Worked with DRS to establish SRC management of list-serve through the DRS for the Council to conduct SRC business
- Continued to improve the SRC web-site accessibility through the Department of Human Services
- Continued to increase participation in the public hearing process by improving communication and outreach to clients

## WANT TO JOIN US?

If you are a person with a disability or someone interested in having input regarding employment services to individuals with disabilities, the Tennessee Rehabilitation Council may be for you!

If you are interested in learning more about this unique opportunity to serve, please contact Mark Montgomery, SRC Chair, at 615-255-0283 or [mark\\_m@tnsilc.org](mailto:mark_m@tnsilc.org).

## New Members



Michael McGrath  
Knoxville, TN  
Business, Industry and  
Labor Representative



Sharon Bryant  
Ooltewah, TN  
Community Rehabilitation  
Program Representative



Starr Cruise  
Columbia, TN  
Disability Advocacy  
Representative

## **MESSAGE FROM KIM WILLIAMS, SRC Chair**

2010 has been a challenging year in many ways for the Division of Rehabilitation Services and people in Tennessee with disabilities. The largest challenge has been the poor economy that has impacted the individuals the Division serves. People with disabilities who are employed have an even tougher time in this economy finding jobs. Those fortunate enough to have jobs are the most vulnerable when employers are forced to make cutbacks. And then there is the matter of people with disabilities having to stretch dollars just to provide the basics for their families. These economic issues affect the Division's ability to do what it was created to do which is to put people with disabilities to work.

The economy was just one of several factors that led to another decline in successful job placements in 2010. Although the downward trend in successful closures in recent years is frustrating, the real story of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) can't be told with numbers. The real story is when a young blind woman is able to go to college and get a professional job when she graduates. The real story is the young man in a wheelchair who completes a job training class at the Tennessee Rehabilitation Center and returns to his hometown to get a job and becomes a taxpayer rather than a tax consumer. The real story is a man in his 30's who suddenly becomes disabled and thinks his life is over until VR shows him he has a future and helps him realize he has a reason to go on. These are examples of what VR is all about and why it is an important service provided by the state.

The State Rehabilitation Council is proud of the role it plays in assisting our fellow citizens with disabilities to become employed. Most of us have disabilities and are former VR clients so we understand what the people who receive VR services are going through. We understand the frustrations, the feelings of uncertainty, the insecurities, and the fears. But we also understand the feelings you get if you have a job earning a paycheck and providing for your family. As SRC members we bring this unique perspective to the process and it helps us advise the Division. We are committed to continuing to work cooperatively with the Division of Rehabilitation Services to help more people with disabilities experience these same type of successes.

VR has a rich history in Tennessee and the SRC looks with great expectations to the future when we can reverse course and increase the number of people with disabilities going to work in our great state.



## **MESSAGE FROM ANDREA COOPER, DHS Assistant Commissioner for Rehabilitation Services**

The Division of Rehabilitation Services (Division) made further progress in 2010 to position the vocational rehabilitation program for increased successful employment outcomes as the economy recovers. The prior year's waiting list release gave the Division 6,000 cases, some as old as nine years, to re-contact and assess in order to keep our waiting list small and fresh. A smaller waiting list puts the Division in a better position for frequent waiting list releases, which means vocational rehabilitation opportunities for more clients. Indeed, the Division released an additional 1,800 cases from the waiting list near the end of this fiscal year.

The Division concluded its exception process for the newly implemented economic needs test on tuition. We granted exceptions to the needs test under certain conditions to clients who were in the midst of completing a post-secondary training program. Processing the exceptions used a large amount of financial and staff resources, but the Division agreed with the SRC's concern that there should be a mechanism to ease the effects of the policy change on clients with training programs in progress. The payoff was a tuition policy that more equitably distributes vocational rehabilitation funding.

This year the Division launched a "Think Employment First" campaign to help staff focus on effective and efficient use of limited vocational rehabilitation resources. This focus is particularly critical to our goal for keeping clients off of a waiting list under our Order of Selection. The campaign took a "back to basics" approach of ensuring that every hour, every service, and every dollar expended tie directly to moving a client towards successful employment. Think Employment First included statewide training on enhancing informed choice by conducting early career exploration with clients and exposing them to job experiences as part of the development of the individualized plan for employment (IPE). We risk a disservice to clients and a waste of resources if we let a client identify an employment goal without this exploration or if we provide services not tied to an employment goal. Finally, the campaign included enhanced case review and targeted training to improve the speed and certainty of successful employment outcomes.

Efficiency in vocational rehabilitation services will also be enhanced by the implementation of TRIMS, the Division's new electronic case management system. Thanks to the ARRA funding, the Division purchased and began configuring and testing TRIMS this year. The Division and its vendor, Libera, moved at a remarkable pace to map out the Division's business processes and customize an otherwise "off of the shelf" product. Thanks to this partnership, TRIMS is on schedule to begin field roll out in March 2011 with full implementation by July 2011. Although implementation and training for the system will take a lot of time, this investment positions the Division for increased employment outcomes.

Finally, I enlisted the support and expertise of our regional supervisors and our federal Technical Assistance and Continuing Education (TACE) partner to build strategies for increased successful employment outcomes.

Those strategies include examining how we assign priority categories, evaluation methods for community rehabilitation providers, and techniques to get clients through the final stretch to employment such as enhanced use of on the job training.

It takes time to change infrastructure and culture, but I am proud of the significant steps that the Division has taken to position our clients for success in a changing economy and workforce.

