

ANNUAL REPORT
NEVADA REHABILITATION COUNCIL
FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR 1999

KATHLEEN OLSON, Chairperson
Vocational Rehabilitation Council

MAYNARD YASMER, Administrator
Nevada Rehabilitation Division

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OVERVIEW OF NEVADA'S VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNCIL (VRC)

One year after the Workforce Investment Act became national policy and the 1998 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act redefined the roles and responsibilities of state rehabilitation councils, Nevada's VRC has held two training sessions with a professional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program facilitator, to better understand its functions and its course of action.

In October 1998 the Council identified its vision of being the leader in providing policy direction and philosophical guidance for service providers and consumers of employment-related disability services in Nevada. In September 1999 a follow-up training was scheduled to help the Council more specifically identify its partnership role with Nevada's VR program, the Council's goals and plan of action. From the training the Council expressed its desire to be both an advocate and activist. More specifically, the Council expressed its interest in being a (positive) activist partner with the Rehabilitation Division and with other councils. The desired result is to improve services to people with disabilities through the VR program.

COUNCIL FUNCTIONS AND PERFORMANCE

As stated in the 1998 Amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, the principal functions of the VRC are outlined as follow:

- Review, analyze and advise the VR unit regarding VR's performance
- In partnership with the VR unit, develop, agree to and review State goals and priorities and evaluate the effectiveness of the VR program, including submission of an annual progress report to the RSA Commissioner
- Advise the VR agency regarding VR activities
- Assist in preparation of the State Plan, amendments to it, applications, reports, needs assessments, and evaluations
- Review and analyze the effectiveness of and the consumer satisfaction with VR functions and services, including employment outcomes
- Prepare and submit an annual report
- Coordinate the activities of the Council with those of other Councils
- Provide for the coordination and the establishment of working relationships between the VR agency and the State Independent Living Council and centers for independent living

In the light of these functions, what work did the Council perform in FFY 1999?

Accessibility

The Council continued to be an advocate for and responsive to the need for program access and physical access. The Council learned that, at a Sparks, Nevada collocated building housing the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Employment Security Division (ESD), front doors to the building were difficult to open for some employees and clients with disabilities. The Council

advocated for improvements which have been made in terms of door opening ease and the presence of a security official to provide door opening assistance.

In Southern Nevada an ESD and BVR collocated office also was reviewed for alleged problems with parking and bathroom accessibility. Findings were submitted but, before they were addressed, the office was relocated. Moreover, at the main Las Vegas BVR & BSBVI office, Council members spent one morning with managerial and program staff. The cramped and dreary environment for clients and staff alike concerned the Council, which went on record as recommending improvements. A positive change occurred subsequent to the visit, including increased privacy and an increase in space for staff, equipment, files, etc.

The Council also begins FFY 2000 with new efforts to make its meetings and activities more accessible, those Council members for whom travel is difficult, as meeting sites will be altered between Las Vegas and Carson City. The communities are more than 450 miles apart. An initial experiment will be made with video teleconferencing. Telephone conferencing is another option that may be attempted. The Council is finalizing a web page incorporated within the Rehabilitation Division website (as is the case with the various bureaus of the Division) to promote information sharing about the Council and its work.

Assessments of Satisfaction with the Vocational Rehabilitation Programs

1. *Consumer satisfaction survey.* In December 1998 the VRC produced and mailed the survey to 1,590 status 26 (cases closed successfully with an employment outcome) and status 28 (cases closed unsuccessfully without an employment outcome) consumers of BVR/BSBVI regarding services in FFY 1998. This was done after consultation with BVR, BSBVI, the Division Administrator and the Bureau of Research and Analysis unit of the Employment Security Division. Nevada's mobile population resulted in 190 questionnaires being undelivered. This resulted in 1,400 net individuals who apparently received the survey. Of that number 253, or 19%, responded. The Council survey yielded the following results:

- 59% of people (122 of 220) who responded to the question “are you still employed” and “is your job full time” said they were working full time
- More than half of the respondents had vacation time (117 of 190) and medical benefits (98 of 184) and 48% (87 of 182) had sick time benefits

- 77% of those working (162 of 209) were happy with their jobs
- 75% (161 of 216) of respondents agreed that services from the VR programs helped them become employed
- 83% (198 of 238) of respondents would recommend VR services to a friend
- 94% (234 of 250) of respondents felt they were treated in a timely and courteous manner and that staff understood their particular disability

2. ***Needs assessment.*** From late 1998 through early 1999 the Council's Consumer Services Committee took the lead in conceptualizing Nevada's 1999 statewide comprehensive needs assessment. The committee met four times to develop the needs assessment methodology, survey forms and to explore ways the project could be implemented in a timely and cost effective manner. In June the full Council made some final recommendations, such as some questions being open ended to encourage comments by respondents. The Council then approved the committee's final report and recommended it to the Rehabilitation Division for implementation.

The recommended assessment is directed toward employers, consumers, and rehabilitation counselors and technicians. After review of the needs assessment plan by VR program management and the Rehabilitation Division Administrator, the statewide project was split into a Northern Nevada project and a Southern Nevada project. After all the data are gathered they will be given to the Bureau of Research and Analysis, which will compile and analyze the data, then present the data to the VR programs and the Council. These programs will then make recommendations for potential changes.

3. ***Public forums.*** Each spring, public hearings are held to receive public input about the VR system and services. This year public input resulted in requests for:

- Increased sensitivity by VR programs staff toward those with learning disabilities
- Improved transition planning and additional counselors to serve in school districts
- More service in the rural areas

This led to Council to ask how it could provide support to the Rehabilitation Division in its request for additional counselor positions from the State Legislature. Discussion also resulted in the Council soliciting additional information from the State Department of Education, Educational Equity unit, regarding the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act, alternative graduation paths available to Nevada high school students, and how the Council might assist in the development of reforms to benefit graduating students with disabilities.

Policies and Procedures.

As outlined in the Rehabilitation Act Amendments, VR program policy and procedure changes are to be reviewed by the Council. The Rehabilitation Division's "Vocational Rehabilitation Program Policy and Procedures Manual," was re-written earlier this year. The Council helped draft the changes prior to Council review and approval in June 1999.

State Plan.

Similarly, a number of changes were made to the State Plan prior to its submission to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) in June 1999. The Council's Policy and Planning Committee and Council's staff liaison to the Rehabilitation Division were involved in the writing and review of changes to the State Plan prior to Council discussion and approval at its June meeting.

Subsequent to the State Plan's submission to the District IX office of the RSA Nevada's Governor instituted a directive to reassign personnel from layoffs at the Employer's Insurance Company of Nevada (EICON). Some rehabilitation counselors from EICON were referred to the VR programs for hiring considerations although at least one that was hired did not meet the minimum academic requirements expected of a VR counselor as identified in the Division's Comprehensive System of Personnel Development.

The Council expressed concern that the reassignment impacted the integrity of the vocational rehabilitation programs and resulted in non-compliance with the State Plan and the Rehabilitation Act. The Council also wrote the Governor, asking that corrective action be taken, stating that only

the most qualified personnel should be hired, or else the VR programs may be out of compliance with Federal and state laws.

Grants Supported with Council-Designated Funds.

During FFY 1999 the Council acted to approve the use of some of its Title I, Section 110 funds to explore or set in motion innovative employment projects for people with disabilities. One is the "Rural Pilot Project," a collaborative effort primarily between the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation, rural economic development authorities and rural private businesses. The grant focuses on employing disabled individuals in rural areas where jobs are scarce, especially with a sharp downturn in mining enterprises that have been the linchpin of the economies of many rural communities. The details and agreements necessary to implement this new program gradually are being resolved and startup is expected next year.

Another grant was stimulated by the Council's desire to examine the feasibility of improving rehabilitation closures with homebound employment via telecommuting. The feasibility study would need to include what types of services would be marketable in Nevada. The feasibility study will be completed in FFY 2000, with results and recommendations brought to the Council for discussion and potential further action.

During FFY 1999 additional Council grant funds were used for its September training on goals and objectives and for technical assistance that addressed two items: how to streamline the service to clients of the VR process by identifying and recommending the elimination of institutional barriers to vocational rehabilitation service delivery; and coordination of the biennial competency-based needs assessment for rehabilitation counselors.

Coordination with Other Councils and Outreach

As a matter of policy, the VRC routinely invites and receives reports from other state councils or entities including:

- Developmental Disabilities Council
- State Independent Living Council

- Mental Health Planning Council
- Workforce Investment Board

The VRC also schedules at each meeting formal presentations by, or an opportunity to carry on question and answer sessions with, the bureau chiefs of the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Bureau of Services to the Blind and Visually Impaired.

As a matter of policy, the VRC also invited during FFY 1999 a guest presentation at each VRC meeting from individuals representing, for example, community-based employment agencies and the Nevada Department of Education program responsible for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Information imparted by those outside the VRC, about their programs and about the need for reciprocal support (such as at the state or national legislative level), has been important in the promotion of shared interests. Examples include the need for state matching funds, affordable and accessible housing for people with disabilities and improved access to health care programs. The benefit of collaboration and information sharing also was exemplified when a representative of the Developmental Disabilities Council shared with the VRC information about Welfare to Work programs and national legislation involving work incentives with health care coverage. This occurred at a national Commission on Developmental Disabilities meeting, which VRC members would not have attended.

Separate from coordination and collaboration with other entities, during FFY 1999 the Council also supported the idea of a video to promote Nevada's VR programs to employers. Due to a transition in leadership of the committee leading the effort, the feasibility of that project is being reevaluated for future discussion.

Finally, in April the VRC Chairperson attended a joint RSA/CSAVR meeting in Washington, D.C., where an array of topics including the Workforce Investment Act were discussed. Five months later, in September, the new VRC Chairperson attended the RSA State Rehabilitation Council Symposium in Washington, D.C., where networking and information sharing occurred between Federal authorities and State Rehabilitation Council representatives.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES FOR FFY 2000

At its recent training that focused on goals and objectives for the new millennium, Council members were united in identifying a new course of action: activism and advocacy, but activism in partnership with the Rehabilitation Division. In agreeing to that the Council also decided to simplify its committee structure, to two main committees: Marketing and Advocacy, and Oversight. Subsumed under those two committees are several objectives that may result in the formation of subcommittees to accomplish or that may be performed by the full Council.

This annual report has shown that the Council and its members have been active in meeting assigned responsibilities under the Rehabilitation Act and have been advocates in support the Act, the Division and accessibility . In the year ahead Council goals may include greater efforts to assist the Division's need for increased funding, adequate state matching funds, increased staffing, improved effectiveness and efficiency of the vocational rehabilitation programs. The Council also will provide guidance regarding the use and allocation of vocational rehabilitation staff and financial resources, work to ensure consumer satisfaction, and work to ensure efficacy of the State Plan.

To accomplish these objectives we will need to recruit new members to fill vacant positions, will need the help of Rehabilitation Division staff to provide statistical data vital to our efforts, and will need to expand our relationships with other councils and entities. The Council looks forward to a challenging year ahead and to the rewards it may produce in the interests of Nevada's vocational rehabilitation programs to assist Nevadans with disabilities.

NEVADA VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNCIL
Membership Listing - October 1999

<u>Name</u>	<u>Category</u>	<u>Geographic Area</u>	<u>Organization</u>
Dr. Ralph Baker	Independent Living Council Disability	Rural Nevada	Rural Mental Health Clinic
Dr. William Bauer	Client Assistance Program Disability	Northern Nevada	Client Assistance Program
Cruz Bonilla	Disability Advocacy Group Disability	Southern Nevada	So. Nevada Ctr. for Indep. Living
Bill Boster	Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor/Disability	Northern Nevada	Bureau of Voc. Rehabilitation
Marcia de Braga	Business & Industry Disability	Rural Nevada	Business
Toni Caruso	Voc. Rehab. Client Disability	Northern Nevada	
Marsha Lakes	IDEA	Southern Nevada	Nevada Dept. of Education
Florence La Roy	Parent Training & Info. Ctr.	Southern Nevada	Nevada Parent Training & Info. Center
Lorraine Marshall	Disability Advocacy Group	Southern Nevada	Dept. of Energy
Karla McComb	Workforce Investment Board Disability	Southern Nevada	Clark County School District
Rosalind McNeely, Co-Chair	Business & Industry	Northern Nevada	Private health care facility
Kathleen Olson, Co-Chair		Northern Nevada	
Maynard Yasmer	Ex-Officio Disability		Administrator, Rehabilitation Div.
Vacant	Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider		

Vacant Business & Industry (2 positions)