



MARYLAND STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

**MARYLAND'S ADVOCATES FOR
PUBLIC VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION**

FY 2006 ANNUAL REPORT

Maryland State Rehabilitation Council

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December 2006

To the Citizens of Maryland:

The Maryland State Rehabilitation Council (MSRC) is pleased to present this report about our Federal Fiscal Year 2006 accomplishments. The Council is fully committed to advising and supporting the Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) as it promotes the employment, economic self-sufficiency and independence of individuals with disabilities.

During 2006, the MSRC was involved in many activities with and in support of DORS. Some highlights include:

- Facilitating annual public meetings to learn about the public's perceptions of Maryland's vocational rehabilitation (VR) program.
- Providing guidance and oversight to DORS newly-established Office for Blindness & Vision Services.
- Educating consumers about Maryland's new Employed Individuals with Disabilities Program, which allows those who receive public benefits to go to work without fear of losing health coverage.
- Participating in face-to-face office visits with members of the General Assembly to discuss issues of concern to people with disabilities, including full funding for the VR program.
- Participating in the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation meetings to improve the effectiveness of state rehabilitation councils nationwide.

The Council has many continuing and new challenges. Due to static funding levels and increasing costs of products and services, DORS is not able to assist all who ask for DORS services. At the end of fiscal year 2006, over 1,550 people with significant disabilities were on DORS waiting list for services.

Employment not only provides individuals with disabilities independence and dignity; it also provides significant returns for Maryland's economy. The Council anticipates an active and visible role in encouraging additional funding for VR programs and further enhancing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in Maryland. We welcome the support of all Marylanders who share this goal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Larry Abramson".

Larry Abramson, Chairperson
Maryland State Rehabilitation Council

The Maryland State Rehabilitation Council

Who are we?



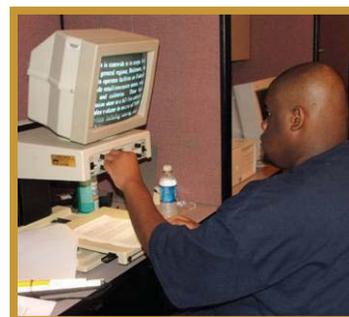
The Maryland State Rehabilitation Council (MSRC) is made up of individuals who are interested in the success of public vocational rehabilitation programs. Members are appointed by the Governor and include representatives from education, rehabilitation, employment, industry and consumer advocacy groups.

The MSRC believes that employment is critical to the quality of life of people with disabilities in Maryland.

What is vocational rehabilitation?

Vocational rehabilitation prepares people with disabilities to go to work, stay on the job or remain independent in their homes and communities. Rehabilitation counselors in DORS offices throughout Maryland provide or arrange for services that may include career counseling, assistive technology, vocational training and job placement assistance.

DORS provides personalized support and employment services so individuals with disabilities can plan a path to a successful career and independent living.



What do we do?



The MSRC takes an active and visible role in how Maryland's public vocational rehabilitation program is administered.

- ❖ We review, analyze and advise DORS regarding performance of its responsibilities and quality of its services.
- ❖ We ensure that the needs of individuals with disabilities are identified and addressed by state and federal legislators, service providers, employers and the community.
- ❖ We collaborate with organizations and other state councils to promote services to underserved and unserved populations.
- ❖ We develop and review State goals and priorities, and assist in the preparation of Maryland's annual State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation.

Vocational Rehabilitation:

Maryland State Rehabilitation Council members volunteer their time to ensure that Marylanders with disabilities receive quality vocational rehabilitation services. Here are a few of the thousands who participated in DORS programs last year:

DORS Helps Author with Autism Speak to the World



Sarah Stup (c) and members of her DORS team at the debut of *Do-si-Do with Autism*.

"When I write, I am not held back at all. I can be anyone or anything, and I can go new places with new ideas. For me, writing is power and freedom," writes Frederick native Sarah Stup. Autism prevents Sarah from speaking and makes it hard for her to control her body. She communicates through her writing, one painstaking letter at a time picked out on a special device.

Sarah's dream was to become a working writer. DORS role was to make her employment goal a reality. Sarah's first children's book, *Do-si-Do with Autism*, was published in March of 2006. DORS helped Sarah with career counseling, a business marketing plan and start-up funding through the Reach Independence Through Self-Employment (RISE) program.

Partnership Allows Farmer to Return to the Land

James "JR" McGrath had no interest in retiring from his Eastern Shore farm after a leg amputation. Because of a partnership between DORS and the Delaware/Maryland AgrAbility Project, he and more than 60 other farmers have resumed farming after becoming disabled.

DORS Rehabilitation Technology Services and AgrAbility identified and provided products that help JR work his family's farm as he's done for decades. In addition to a prosthetic leg, JR now uses a custom-designed ladder and handrail to get up into his tractor. A simplified seeding method was designed for him.

"I've never had help from anybody except these two hands," said James McGrath. "But this program is good not only for the things, but for what it brought me mentally. My goal is to farm."



James McGrath uses his modified tractor.

Working in Maryland

Blind Students Learn All About College Exploration (and a whole lot more)

All About College Exploration (ACE) is a two-week summer program for high school juniors and seniors who are blind or have a significant vision loss and plan to attend college. ACE prepares students for college classes, dormitory living and social activities.

DORS Office for Blindness & Vision Services holds the ACE program at DORS Workforce & Technology Center in Baltimore, where students can choose to live in the dorms or commute from home. ACE encourages students to visit local colleges, participate in activities to develop independent living skills, and increase self-advocacy skills. There is a special emphasis on assistive technology and other devices and software that lead to success in college, recreation and cultural activities.



ACE students build confidence through recreational activities.

Governor's QUEST Internship Leads to a Future



Brice Miller (seated) and his colleagues at the State Highway Administration.

Brice Miller thought about many careers over the years he attended the Maryland School for the Deaf. Ultimately, his strengths in math led him to DORS Workforce & Technology Center's Computerized Accounting training program.

After completing his coursework, he worked as an intern at the State Highway Administration through the Governor's QUEST Internship Program for Persons with Disabilities. He used his computer and database management skills to work as an environmental technician. Brice tracked and managed information about road damage, highway safety, water quality and highway animal accidents.

Brice's employers at the SHA were so impressed with him, they worked with their contractor to hire him after the internship ended.

What Can DORS Do for Maryland Businesses?

The MSRC has supported DORS in its efforts to help Maryland's business community recruit qualified workers and build a diverse workforce. A member of the MSRC is part of the newly-created Employer Service Implementation Council, which is led by DORS Director Robert A. Burns. The Employer Service Implementation Council builds corporate partnerships and streamlines intra-agency communication to better serve Maryland's workforce.

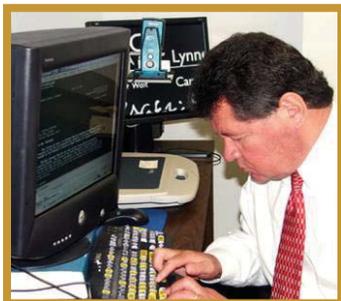
Match qualified applicants with job openings

- ❖ Pre-screened, qualified applicants ready for work, many with successful completion of vocational training, higher education and work preparation services
- ❖ Workforce & Technology Center graduates with valuable job skills including computer-aided drafting, office technology, security and Net+ Certification



Funding for on-the-job training

- ❖ Train new employees to the specific needs and requirements of your business
- ❖ Arrange reimbursement for a percentage of the trainee's wages
- ❖ Follow-along services to the trainee and employer



Identify and obtain technologies to increase workplace productivity and success

- ❖ Customized magnifiers, lighting, computer screen enlargement or reading software for people who have difficulty reading standard print.
- ❖ Modified workstations that increase the productivity of people with orthopedic and other disabilities.
- ❖ Computer software and adaptive keyboards for people who have difficulty using a standard mouse and keyboard.

No-cost worksite consultation

- ❖ On-the-job worksite consultations help employers hire qualified workers and retain valued employees with disabilities.

Provide services for workplace disability issues

- ❖ Guidance about federal and state disability tax credits.
- ❖ Worksite assessments and recommendations.
- ❖ Accessible worksites and services for employees and customers.
- ❖ Staff training about disabilities and disability myths.
- ❖ Inclusion of candidates with disabilities in recruitment.
- ❖ Information about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).



Ongoing employment consultation

- ❖ Employer satisfaction with personal follow-up for at least the employee's first three months on the job.

DORS 2006 Highlights

Vocational rehabilitation changes lives while remaining cost-effective.



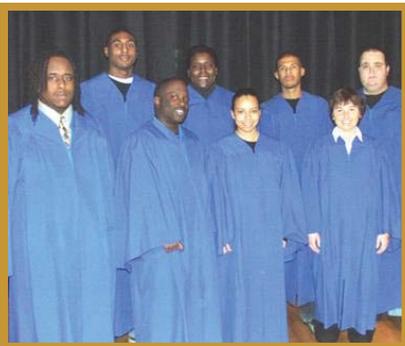
- ❖ Last year, DORS matched 3,082 qualified individuals to job openings in Maryland businesses.
 - ❖ Only 14% of people who applied for DORS services said that wages were their primary means of support. Once they completed services, 82% reported wages, not public benefits, as their primary source of support.
 - ❖ The average cost per person rehabilitated is \$4,077. This cost to the State is paid back, through taxes and reduced reliance on public benefits, in 2 to 4 years.
- ❖ People who went to work after taking part in DORS programs contributed over \$46 million to the state's economy in their first year working.

Growth and success mark the second year of DORS Office for Blindness & Vision Services.

- ❖ The Office for Blindness & Vision Services (OBVS) helped 180 people who are blind or have a vision loss become successfully employed, a 32% increase over last year when the office was established.
- ❖ The average hourly wage for OBVS consumers is \$13.66.
- ❖ More than \$2.9 million in case service dollars supported employment plans for individuals who are blind or vision impaired – a 61% increase over last year.



The Workforce & Technology Center (WTC) consistently exceeds its goals.



- ❖ 745 individuals went to work after taking part in WTC career assessment, career and technology training, rehabilitation technology and other programs – a 6½% increase over the previous year.
- ❖ WTC exceeded its goals in serving young people transitioning from high school to college or employment (117%), serving consumers with blindness or low vision (132%) and in providing assistive technology services (104%).

Anne Rea Champions Maryland's Employed Individuals with Disabilities Program

"People with disabilities want to work," says MSRC member Anne Rea, Director of Employment Programs at Way Station, Inc., in Frederick. "But for many, having the skills, desire and commitment to work is not enough to counter the risk of losing health care and the coverage they need for acute and long-term support services." Last year, Maryland's legislators helped to reduce this barrier to employment by funding the Employed Individuals with Disabilities (EID) Program. Now, many working Marylanders with disabilities are eligible for extended Medical Assistance health benefits through EID.

The MSRC recently honored Ms. Rea for her many years of work as chairman of the Maryland Coalition for Work Incentive Improvements, which championed the development and implementation of this legislation and other ways to break down the barriers that keep people with disabilities from working and moving off public benefits.

Ms. Rea gives some of the credit for the program's passage back to her colleagues on the MSRC. "The MSRC was one very important organization who spoke directly with Maryland legislators in support of the program, resulting in the legislation being passed unanimously." The EID Program went into effect April 1, 2006.

In her more than 20 years at Way Station, a not-for-profit mental health organization that provides services to people with serious mental illness, emotional and behavioral disabilities, and other disabling conditions, Ms. Rea has become a recognized statewide leader in the growth of workforce programs for people with disabilities. She has developed mental health supported employment programs, a developmental disabilities supported employment program and veterans' employment services, giving her an in-depth understanding of the needs of people with disabilities who want to go to work.

Ms. Rea says her work on the EID program is not finished. She believes there are other innovative approaches that will encourage people with disabilities who receive public benefits to go to work and become taxpayers.



(clockwise from left) MSRC Chairperson Larry Abramson, Anne Rea and Vice-Chairperson Andrea Buonincontro

MSRC 2006 Council Membership



Lawrence Abramson

Director of Vocational Services, St. Luke's House, Inc.
MSRC Chairperson

Timothy Atkinson

Executive Director, The Arc of Carroll County
Chairperson, MSRC Resource & Program Planning Committee

Thomas Barkley

Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services, Maryland State Department of Education
Member, MSRC Public Relations & Quality Assurance Committee

John Brennan

Chief of Staff, Maryland Department of Disabilities
Member, MSRC Blindness & Vision Services Committee

Andrea Buonincontro

Executive Director, Making Choices for Independent Living, Inc.
MSRC Vice Chairperson
Chairperson, MSRC Membership Committee
Member, MSRC Policy & State Plan Development Committee

Robert Burns

Assistant State Superintendent in Rehabilitation Services
Chairperson, MSRC Employment & Career Development Committee

Joyce Callahan

ADA Compliance Advocate, Maryland Transit Administration
Chairperson, MSRC Blindness & Vision Services Committee

Charles Crawford

Public Advocate
Member, MSRC Blindness & Vision Services Committee

Ross Edwards

Ross & Tine Transportation, Owner
Member, MSRC Employment & Career Development Committee

Niles Ellingson

Director of Vocational Services, Helping Up Mission
Member, MSRC Resource & Program Planning Committee

James P.G. Flynn, M.D.

University Specialty Hospital
Member, MSRC Employment & Career Development Committee

Beth Lash

Client Assistance Program Director, Division of Rehabilitation Services
Chairperson, MSRC Policy & State Plan Development Committee
Member, MSRC Public Relations & Quality Assurance Committee

Kali Mallik

President, Alliance, Inc.
Member, MSRC Employment & Career Development Committee

Terri Massie-Burrell

Director, Academic Achievement Center, Towson University
Immediate Past MSRC Chairperson
Member, MSRC Employment & Career Development Committee

Gerald Pantaleo, Jr.

Educator/Public Advocate
Chairperson, MSRC Public Relations & Quality Assurance Committee

Anne Rea

Director of Employment & Resource Management Services, Way Station
Member, MSRC Resource & Program Planning Committee

James Reissig

Rehabilitation Counselor, Division of Rehabilitation Services
Member, MSRC Resource & Program Planning Committee

Robert W. Seurkamp

Executive Director, Governor's Workforce Investment Board
Member, MSRC Employment & Career Development Committee

Michael Shaw

Academic Advisor, Baltimore City Community College
Member, MSRC Policy & State Plan Development Committee

Alfred Sonnenstrahl

Public Advocate
Member, MSRC Policy & State Plan Development Committee

Josie Thomas

Executive Director, Parent's Place of Maryland, Inc.
Member, MSRC Policy & State Plan Development Committee

Teresa Uttermohlen

Public Advocate
Member, MSRC Blindness & Vision Services Committee

Andrea Buonincontro MRA Humanitarian of the Year

"Andrea Buonincontro is a tireless grassroots advocate for individuals with disabilities who is valued for meeting each individual where they are in life and providing the help and support they need," declared the Maryland Rehabilitation Association (MRA) as they presented Andrea Buonincontro with their 2006 Humanitarian Award. The annual award is presented to an individual who has exercised notable leadership in removing environmental or legal barriers, thereby preventing discrimination against individuals with disabilities and supporting the rights and benefits due to every citizen. "No issue or individual concern is too small for Ms. Buonincontro," the MRA concluded.



Vice chairperson of the MSRC since 2005, Ms. Buonincontro works as the Executive Director of Making Choices for Independent Living (MCIL), a non-profit agency in Baltimore City that also serves Baltimore, Anne Arundel, Carroll, Harford and Howard Counties. MCIL offers advocacy, independent living skills training, information and referral, and peer counseling.

When she first started with MCIL, she assisted non-elderly people with disabilities move out of nursing homes and back into the community. "That was a real eye-opener for me," she says. "I have had a disability all of my life, but this was the first time that I really challenged some of my own attitudes and beliefs."

Before becoming Executive Director of the agency, Ms. Buonincontro served as Project Director of MCIL's Benefits Resource Center, which provides information and assistance to recipients of Social Security disability benefits who want to go to work. "For too long, people with disabilities have believed that they had to choose between the lesser of two evils when it comes to employment - either stay below set income limits or lose critical health and financial benefits," she says. "Benefits planning helps people with disabilities steer through the complicated maze of public and private benefits programs."

Ms. Buonincontro believes that what she's learned in her work with the MSRC has helped her in her position at MCIL, and her experiences at MCIL help the MSRC shape public vocational rehabilitation in Maryland. "Because it is a group of people from all different walks of life who are dedicated to vocational rehabilitation, the MSRC has really helped promote the use of benefits planning for everyone who is currently seeking employment or looking to advance in their work. The MSRC will continue to be a voice for the importance of benefits planning in vocational rehabilitation programs."

MSRC Committee Activities



Blindness & Vision Services Committee: Joyce Callahan, Chair

The Blindness & Vision Services Committee assists in the development, monitoring and evaluation of DORS services for consumers who are blind and vision impaired, including oversight of DORS Office for Blindness & Vision Services (OBVS). A majority of this committee's members are individuals with significant vision impairments.

Additional 2006 Activities

- Reviewed DORS policies and procedures for higher education and the assistive technology loan program.
- Oversaw the implementation of a third-party customer satisfaction survey for OBVS consumers.
- Corresponded with the President of the Maryland State Board of Education to support additional funds for vocational rehabilitation programs for people who are blind.
- Took part in presentations and on-site visits to learn about various Maryland programs that serve individuals who are blind.

Employment & Career Development Committee: Robert A. Burns, Chair

The Employment & Career Development Committee advises DORS about building relationships with businesses in order to produce quality employment outcomes for DORS consumers. It also provides oversight for programs and services at the Workforce & Technology Center.

Additional 2006 Activities

- Reviewed the updated Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR) for WTC.
- Supported plans to develop apprenticeship options for consumers.
- Worked with DORS Employer Services Implementation Council to enhance services for businesses.

Membership Committee: Andrea Buonincontro, Chair

The Membership Committee recruits prospective MSRC members, staying mindful of the geographic and disability representation of the membership and compliance with the Rehabilitation Act.

Additional 2006 Activities

- The Membership Committee welcomed Al Sonnenstrahl, Charles Crawford and Teresa Uttermohlen to the MSRC.

Policy & State Plan Development Committee: Beth Lash, Chair

The Policy & State Plan Development Committee assists DORS in the preparation, development and monitoring of the annual State Plan for Rehabilitation Services, participates in DORS policy development and review processes, assists in planning and facilitating annual public forums and ensures that public feedback from these forums is incorporated into strategic planning.

Additional 2006 Activities

- Reviewed findings of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) on-site review.
- Voted to open all future meetings of the committee to the public for comments.
- Reviewed policy issues including presumption of eligibility; ensuring that a consumer's individualized plan for employment (IPE) and employment goal are consistent with the job the consumer ultimately obtains; and the turnaround time for IPE development.

Public Relations & Quality Assurance Committee: Jerry Pantaleo, Chair

The Public Relations & Quality Assurance Committee develops the MSRC Annual Report, coordinates legislative and other publicity activities of the MSRC, reviews and analyzes the results of DORS annual consumer satisfaction surveys and periodically review the Client Assistance Program and Mediation and Appeals processes.

Additional 2006 Activities

- Organized the 2006 MSRC Legislative Event, which focused on supporting the Medicaid Buy-In program.
- Developed outreach to new and returning Maryland Legislators.

Resource & Program Planning Committee: Tim Atkinson, Chair

The Resource & Program Planning Committee assists in the development and monitoring of DORS program plans and activities, assists in the development of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment of the rehabilitation and career needs of individuals with severe disabilities, and evaluates the effectiveness and outcomes of DORS programs and services.

Additional 2006 Activities

- Participated in DORS semiannual program planning meeting, where topics included transitioning caseloads and the evaluation of transitioning counselors, supporting supervisors in DORS field offices, and SSA's Ticket-to-Work program.
- Developed DORS operational plan and the DORS section of the MSDE five-year Strategic Plan.
- Reviewed DORS personnel development program.

2006 MSRC Honors

The Maryland State Rehabilitation Council recognizes the outstanding professionals in the field of public vocational rehabilitation and sets aside time at its meetings to recognize DORS counselors who make a difference.

Sharon Plump **DORS Rehabilitation Counselor, Westminster**



Sharon Plump (r) encourages her consumers, most of whom have persistent mental illness, to reach for their dreams and realize their potential. She helped several consumers reach their goal of self-employment and, as a result, her region now pilots a self-employment program for people with chronic mental illness. Seeing another need, she set up a program for individuals with both mental and physical disabilities transitioning from the local detention center. This led to successful employment outcomes in a sometimes-overlooked population.

Karen Love Hanes **DORS Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf, Frederick**



Karen Love Hanes (r) and Tracey Wyant (l) are both recognized for their outstanding work with people who are deaf or hard of hearing, helping them achieve employment and economic self-sufficiency, thus making them able to move from public benefits to employment.



Tracey Wyant **DORS Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf, Germantown**

Allen Sullivan **DORS Counselor, Office for Blindness & Vision Services, Westminster**

Allen Sullivan leads DORS Office for Blindness & Vision Services (OBVS) in competitive employment outcomes. Competitive employment is work in the general labor market performed alongside people who may not have a disability and who make similar wages. Allen had 20 competitive employments in 2006 for people who are blind or severely vision impaired, which was 90% of his total outcomes. Nationally, agencies for the blind average 55% of their outcomes in competitive employment.



2007 Meeting Schedule

MSRC members assist DORS in carrying out its mission at quarterly meetings, in extensive sub-committee work and with informal consultation. For more information about the meetings: www.dors.state.md.us/DORS/SRC.

DATE OF MEETING	LOCATION/TIME
February 6, 2007	Legislative Event, Annapolis
March 2007	Statewide Public Forums
May 9, 2007	Workforce & Technology Center 4:30 – 7:00 pm
August 2007	Executive Committee Retreat
September 19, 2007	Workforce & Technology Center 4:30 – 7:00 pm
November 14, 2007	Workforce & Technology Center 4:30 – 7:00 pm

If you are interested in obtaining more information about the MSRC or would like to be considered for membership, please contact:

MSRC Membership Chairperson
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Email: dors@dors.state.md.us

Braille and large print copies and other formats of this report may be obtained by calling 1-888-554-0334.

BELIEF STATEMENT

The Maryland State Rehabilitation Council (MSRC) believes that employment is critical to the quality of citizenship of people with disabilities in Maryland.

The MSRC advocates in Maryland for:

- ❖ Increased employment for people with disabilities.
- ❖ Increased awareness of individuals with disabilities and their employment capabilities.
- ❖ State policies that encourage and support employment.

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