

MARYLAND STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

MARYLAND'S ADVOCATES
FOR PUBLIC VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION

FY 2008 ANNUAL REPORT



The Maryland State Rehabilitation Council

Who are we?



The Maryland State Rehabilitation Council (MSRC) is made up of individuals interested in the success of Maryland's public vocational rehabilitation (VR) 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. A majority of Council members are persons with a disability.

What is vocational rehabilitation?

VR prepares people with disabilities to go to work, stay on the job and remain independent in their homes and communities. In Maryland, public VR is provided by the State Department of Education's Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS).

DORS rehabilitation counselors state-wide provide for services that may include career counseling, assistive technology, vocational training and job placement. 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.

Lawrence Abramson

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

Thomas Barkley

Division of Special Education/Early Intervention Services, MSDE

Andrea Buonincontro

Executive Director, Making Choices for Independent Living

Robert Burns

Assistant State Superintendent in Rehabilitation Services

Joyce Callahan

ADA Compliance Advocate, Maryland Transit Administration

Charles Crawford

Public Advocate

Tim Daly

The Access Group

Ross Edwards

Owner, Ross & Tine Transportation

Niles Ellingson

Director of Vocational Services, Helping Up Mission

Beth Lash

Client Assistance Program Director, DORS

Carol Lewis

Rehabilitation Counselor, DORS

Kali Mallik

Public Advocate

Mary Manzoni

Humanim, Inc.

Gerald Pantaleo, Jr.

Educator/Public Advocate

Anne Rea

Director of Employment & Resource Management Services, Way Station

Eric Selzenow

Executive Director, Governor's Workforce Investment Board

Michael Shaw

Academic Advisor, Baltimore City Community College

Alfred Sonnenstrahl

Public Advocate

Josie Thomas

Executive Director, Parents' Place of Maryland, Inc.

Teresa Uttermohlen

Public Advocate

Jennifer Whitcomb

Executive Director, Deaf Independent Living Association, Inc.



ANDREA BUONINCONTRO, CHAIRPERSON

KALI MALLIK, VICE CHAIRPERSON

December 2008

To the Citizens of Maryland:

The Maryland State Rehabilitation Council (MSRC) serves as the people's advocate for increased employment for Marylanders with disabilities, for increased awareness of the employment capabilities of people with disabilities, and for State and national policies that support those goals. Accordingly, the Council monitors and oversees Maryland's Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS, the State agency that provides public vocational rehabilitation services to enable persons with disabilities to go to work) and reports its findings to the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration, the Governor of Maryland and, most importantly, the people of Maryland, as set out in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

In our December 2007 annual summary, the Council sounded an alarm about a growing crisis. For several years now, DORS has been experiencing a very significant shortfall in funding resources which has resulted, and will continue to result, in a significant reduction in service capacity.

How significant?

- ❖ In 2007 DORS matched **3,097** qualified individuals to job openings in Maryland businesses. In 2008 DORS only had the resources to find jobs for **2,290** – a **26% reduction in employment outcomes**.
- ❖ At the end of State fiscal year 2008, nearly **5,300** Marylanders with disabilities were on a **waiting list for DORS services**. Some of them had to be told that it might be **18 months** before their services could even begin – a long time to wait for someone who wants to go to work.
- ❖ Over the last 18 months, DORS has had to **reduce its workforce by 10%** through layoffs or elimination of vacated positions.

Most troubling, much of this occurred well **before** the domino effect of the economic collapses in the housing market, stock market and jobs market that have dominated the beginning of State fiscal year 2009.

How did this happen? Simply stated, the demand for public vocational rehabilitation (VR) services – services that enable people with disabilities to find jobs and go to work – has increased dramatically over the last four years; conversely, Federal funding has not. Since June 2004, DORS had seen a nearly **40% increase in the number of people with disabilities who want to work**. However, the agency's **Federal funding has risen just 6% over the last nine years** while inflation alone has risen more than 23%. Incredibly, in the past two years the agency's Federal funding has actually been **cut** in the face of rising energy and other costs.

The one bright spot has been Governor O'Malley and the Maryland General Assembly. DORS requested additional funding from the State in the FY 2009 budget to eliminate the waiting list. Members of the MSRC visited with our legislators and worked with the community to advocate for this additional funding. Despite overall budget tightening, the Governor and Legislature found a way to allocate an additional \$2.3 million to help Marylanders with disabilities find jobs. DORS commitment in return has been to use that money to reduce the waiting list in half in terms of number of people on the list and the duration of their wait.

Since the beginning of State fiscal year 2009:

- ❖ DORS has cut its waiting list from 5,230 to **less than 2,600**.
- ❖ Length of time spent on the waiting list has been **cut by 50%**.

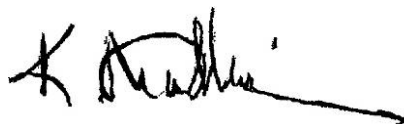
On the road ahead, as the current economic crisis deepens and more people lose their jobs, workforce services like DORS will inevitably be more in demand. As our policymakers on both the State and Federal levels contemplate the difficult budgetary choices they must make, the Council urges them to consider the value of a proven, nationally recognized program like DORS, a program already in place that helps people get jobs, creates new taxpayers, takes people off public assistance and returns millions of dollars each year to Maryland's economy.

The Council strongly believes that any course of action that doesn't include increasing funding of Maryland's VR program to eliminate the waiting list and get people who want jobs back to work as quickly as possible is short-sighted in the current economy. The DORS program has long been recognized as one of the best in the country for providing a path to employment and economic self-sufficiency for persons with significant disabilities. The Maryland State Rehabilitation Council will be working closely with elected officials, DORS consumers and staff and other stakeholders in the coming year to try to resolve these funding issues so that DORS can continue to offer that path to all Marylanders with disabilities who want to go to work.

Sincerely,



Andrea Buonincontro
Chairperson, Maryland State Rehabilitation Council



Kali Mallik
Vice Chair, Maryland State Rehabilitation Council

How does Maryland's VR Federal Funding compare with other states?

The Federal budget line item for vocational rehabilitation has been essentially level funded with minor cost-of-living increases throughout the past eight years. However, because of an antiquated funding formula that determines how much of that money is distributed to each state, funding for Maryland only increased 6.7% between FY 2001 and 2008 while states such as Nevada, Wyoming and Arizona saw increases of 54%, 44% and 39%, respectively. The formula used to allocate the money disproportionately holds a state's per capita income against it. Maryland has one of the highest per capita incomes in the country; therefore, in the flawed logic of the formula, it receives the smallest percentage increase. Thanks to Maryland's Congressional delegation and those of several other high per capita income states, the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently initiated a study of the distribution formula inequity that may someday level the playing field.

What is VR's return on investment?

- ❖ If studies of DORS past record are any indication, of the 2,290 DORS participants who went to work in 2008, 84% will still be working a year from now – the highest retention rate of any Maryland workforce program. They will contribute over \$35.6 million to Maryland's economy in their first year of work.
- ❖ The average cost for a person with disabilities to achieve a successful employment outcome with DORS is \$4,431. This cost to the government is paid back through taxes and reduced reliance on public benefits in just two to four years.
- ❖ The Social Security Administration estimates that when disability benefits recipients go to work, they generate a savings to the Federal treasury and Social Security trust fund of \$7 for every \$1 spent on their VR services.

DORS VR Programs by the Numbers



- ❖ DORS matched **2,290 qualified individuals to job openings** in Maryland businesses. These new workers **contributed \$35.6 million in taxes** to the State's economy.
- ❖ DORS assisted **76 Maryland businesses** with worksite reviews so they could hire new employees or keep valued employees with disabilities.
- ❖ **150 individuals who are blind or visually impaired were successfully employed.** Their average wage was **\$15.37/hour**.
- ❖ DORS served **6,330 students with disabilities** to prepare them to move from high school to employment, higher education or training.
- ❖ DORS helped **899 people with significant disabilities** move from receiving public benefits to becoming **employed taxpayers**.
- ❖ After taking part in career training and rehabilitation technology programs at DORS Workforce & Technology Center (WTC) in Baltimore, **630 individuals went to work**.
- ❖ WTC served **877 transitioning youths** with specialized residential and day programs designed to help high school students with disabilities reach their work and independent living goals.
- ❖ At the end of FY 2008, **46 individuals with brain injuries** were taking part in programs and services and **67 were employed** with the assistance of job coaches as part of the Governor's Employment Initiative for Persons with Acquired Brain Injuries.
- ❖ **140 high school students with disabilities earned work experience** in summer employment programs, including **60** in **Baltimore City's YouthWorks** program.
- ❖ **23 DORS consumers** completed the annual Governor's QUEST Internship Program for Persons with Disabilities, which provides three-month internships in State government. **84%** of QUEST interns from previous years **are currently employed**.

For more information about DORS and vocational rehabilitation in Maryland, please visit: www.md-dors.org/report.



DORS Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf Alisa Redmon (right) with DORS Director of the Office of Field Services Ron Winter

MSRC Honors DORS Counselor for the Deaf

At each quarterly meeting, the MSRC recognizes outstanding vocational rehabilitation professionals and others who make a difference in the lives of individuals with disabilities. For their first 2008 meeting, the Council chose to honor DORS counselor Alisa Redmon.

A graduate of Gallaudet University, Alisa is a Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf in the Towson field office. DORS Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf have additional training to help them serve people who have all types of hearing losses. They understand deaf culture as well as the problems that face people who have lost their hearing later in life. Many are deaf themselves.

Last year, Alisa provided counseling and services that enabled 29 individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing to go into competitive employment in the community. Their average wage was more than \$14.00 per hour.

The Council thanked Alisa Redmon for her exceptional work with DORS. "She is an outstanding resource to the agency and illustrates the professionalism and the connections that DORS staff have developed in communities around our state."

The Work of The State Rehabilitation Council



MSRC Vice Chair Kali Mallik (front left) and the staff of WTC's Academic Services unit: (left to right) Richard Fellin, Melissa James, Jane Englar, Patricia Reichart and Pre-Vocational Services Director Brenda Isennock

Academics Provide Solid Foundation for Employment Success

The Workforce & Technology Center (WTC) in Northeast Baltimore provides career training, technology and a wide range of other services that help people with disabilities go to work. In 2008, the MSRC selected WTC's Academic Services staff for special recognition.

Academic Services instructors provide one-on-one or small group instruction to help DORS consumers master the reading and math skills they need to be successful on their path to employment, whether in a career program at WTC, on-the-job training in the community or preparing for post-secondary education.

Individualized or group GED classes prepare students to get their high school diplomas despite any disability, whether it's been two years or 25 since leaving high school.

The Council was pleased to honor the staff for their "unparalleled skills and commitment to enhancing academic achievement leading to expanded employment options for individuals with significant disabilities."

Review, analyze and advise DORS regarding performance of its responsibilities and quality of its service

- ❖ Public meetings were held throughout Maryland to gather feedback on DORS performance from consumers and other stakeholders, and to discuss topics crucial to the future direction of the agency.
- ❖ The Council reviewed findings of the annual DORS consumer satisfaction survey. 87% of consumers who received DORS services reported overall satisfaction with their VR experience, a 3% increase over the two previous years.
- ❖ The Blindness & Vision Services Committee worked with the University of Maryland to improve the consumer satisfaction survey given to consumers of DORS Office for Blindness & Vision Services (OBVS). In the most recent survey, 92% of the consumers reported being satisfied with their OBVS services.
- ❖ The Council oversaw the work of the Client Assistance Program, which advocates for consumers in Maryland's public VR program.
- ❖ A Council representative served on the interview panel for the hiring of DORS Statewide Coordinator for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services, representing the interests of the deaf and hard-of-hearing community.



MSRC member Jerry Pantaleo moderates a public meeting in Anne Arundel County.

Ensure that the needs of individuals with disabilities are identified and addressed by state and federal legislators, service providers, employers and the community

Legislative

- ❖ At the annual Annapolis legislative event, Council members paid calls on more than 60 State senators and delegates to report on the activities of DORS and the MSRC, with an emphasis on the growing waiting list and funding issues.
- ❖ As part of the Council's ongoing Strategic Federal Legislative Action Plan, the MSRC contacted Maryland's Congressional delegation and the Office of Management & Budget requesting an inquiry into the inequitable federal funding formula, which has raised some states' allocations of VR funds by more than 50% while Maryland's portion has not kept pace with the cost of living.
- ❖ Council members contacted the Governor and their State representatives, urging support of DORS Waiting List Initiative, which requested additional funding in the Governor's budget to specifically target the growing waiting list. Each Council member also mobilized his or her own professional network/advocacy groups to lobby for the Waiting List Initiative.



Maryland State Senator Richard Madaleno meets Montgomery County constituent and MSRC member Charlie Crawford.



MSRC member Jerry Pantaleo (back row, 2nd from right) was among the dignitaries at the signing of Maryland HB 280.

- ❖ Members of the Council presented testimony before the Maryland General Assembly in support of the Tax Credit for Qualifying Employees with Disabilities (HB 280/SB 314).

Service Providers, Employers & the Community

- ❖ Members of the Employment & Career Development Committee worked with DORS, Maryland businesses and other agencies on issues regarding the Governor's Workforce Investment Board, base realignment and closure (BRAC), and other initiatives.
- ❖ The MSRC staffed a booth at the two-day Statewide Transitioning Conference, talking to community members about DORS Waiting List Initiative and how to contact their legislators.
- ❖ The Blindness & Vision Service Committee includes ad hoc members from the major advocacy groups for the blind/vision impairment community who act as advocates within their communities to network job opportunities and promote employment.

Collaborate with organizations and other state councils to promote services to underserved/unserved populations

- ❖ MSRC members served as one-on-one mentors to high school students at the Maryland Youth Leadership Forum, sponsored by DORS, MSDE, MD Department of Disabilities, other agencies and community programs.
- ❖ The Council was active in the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) and the newly created National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils.
- ❖ Members of the Council worked with the Department of Disabilities to revise the Employed Individuals with Disabilities Program (which allows eligible Marylanders with disabilities to pay a small fee and receive health coverage through Medicaid) to enable more people to qualify.

Develop and review State goals and priorities, assist in preparation of the State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation

- ❖ As required by the Rehabilitation Act, the MSRC contributed to and reviewed the annual State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation (**md-dors.org/AboutDORS/Plan**). A summary of the Council's recommendations were that DORS should:
 1. Work to shorten or eliminate the waiting list for services.
 2. Enlist the assistance of the Rehabilitation Services Administration to look at federal funding formula issues that negatively impact DORS.
 3. Modify the Order of Selection to give additional priority to people who need supported employment services, SSI/SSDI beneficiaries, high school students and veterans.
 4. Remain flexible, particularly in policies that pertain to vehicle modifications and providing room & board on college campuses.
 5. Establish a workgroup to study and improve service delivery for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.
 6. Establish a workgroup to examine the unique demands of attracting and retaining qualified DORS staff.
- ❖ Two Council members were part of the team conducting the triennial Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment regarding the needs of Marylanders with disabilities. The full Council reviewed the final report, which can be found at **md-dors.org/AboutDORS/needsassessment**.



DORS Director Robert Burns and MSRC Vice Chair Kali Mallik honor Council member Mary Manzoni, Humanim VP of Vocational Services

MSRC Member Saluted for Community Leadership

Mary Manzoni, VP Vocational Services at Humanim, Inc., was appointed to the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council by the Governor to represent the non-profit community rehabilitation partners like Humanim that work with DORS to help individuals with disabilities go to work, as well as represent the consumers they both serve.

At this year's annual Maryland Rehabilitation Association/DORS Conference, MSRC Vice Chair Kali Mallik and DORS Director Robert Burns surprised Mary by calling her to the podium and presenting her with an award.

"Mary demonstrated her outstanding leadership skills over the past year in educating consumers, service providers and elected officials concerning DORS waiting list and the need for additional public resources.

"She was a key individual in calling the attention of Maryland's Governor and General Assembly to this issue, rallying her network of personal and professional connections to contact their legislators and successfully lobby for additional state funding for DORS. "

For her distinguished service and leadership in this effort, the Council recognized Mary Manzoni with the MSRC Leadership Award.

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.

2009 MEETING SCHEDULE

February 3, 2009

Legislative Event
Annapolis, Maryland

April 2009

Statewide Public Forums

May 6, 2009

Workforce & Technology Center
Baltimore, Maryland
4:30 - 7:00 pm

August 2009

Executive Committee Planning
Meeting

September 16, 2009

Workforce & Technology Center
Baltimore, Maryland
4:30 - 7:00 pm

November 18, 2009

Workforce & Technology Center
Baltimore, Maryland
4:30 - 7:00 pm

For more information about the Maryland State Rehabilitation Council, its meetings and activities, or if you would like to be considered for membership:

MARYLAND STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

2301 Argonne Drive, Baltimore MD 21218

410-554-9437 • TTY 410-554 9411

Fax: 410-554 9412 • Toll Free: 1-888-554 0334

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

WWW.MD-SRC.ORG