

2013



GOVERNOR'S REPORT MONTANA'S STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL

8098

Individuals served by
Vocational Rehabilitation and
Blind Services

1192

Individuals served by
Independent Living Services

818

Individuals served by
Montana Telecommunications
Access Program

675

Individuals served by
Older Blind Services

94

Individuals served by
Visual Medical Services

309

Individuals served by
Extended Employment Services

Mission: The State Rehabilitation Council advises and works with the Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRB) Program to improve policies, programs, delivery of services to consumers, and methods for reaching potential consumers and employers.

For more information on Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services, please visit our website: <http://www.vocrehab.mt.gov>.

STATE REHABILITATION COUNCIL



MESSAGE FROM THE COUNCIL

In order to meet its mission, the State Rehabilitation Council actively promoted and supported the funding and operation of Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRB) through many activities across the state during the past year. This report highlights many of those activities.

The dignity, pride and sense of purpose gained through employment of individuals with disabilities are incalculable. The financial gain afforded VRB program participants, along with the corresponding tax and other benefits to Montana are significant. Through this report, we confirm the commitment of the State Rehabilitation Council members to work diligently on behalf of individuals with disabilities. We will continue to assist and advise VRB to empower all individuals with disabilities to achieve competitive employment and independence in their communities to the benefit of themselves and Montana.

Nina Cramer, Council Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS

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VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR) SUCCESS STORY

This young woman was diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder, depressive disorder, and a reading disorder. She was the single mother of a 4 year old. After starting VR, she experienced a gas explosion at home causing injuries to her eyes, nasal cavity, and arms. She was also involved with other services (TANF, food stamps, Medicaid, Career Training Institute (CTI), and college disability support services.

She was studying X-Ray technology and having a difficult time, but was hard working and determined. Her VR plan focused on completing her degree. With the support of family, VR, partner agencies, and her own hard work, she finished her degree program. Then, due to her reading disorder she struggled with the required state exam. She studied hard, attempted the exam several times and passed. To improve employability, she pursued a mammography endorsement. This required additional training. VR worked with CTI to provide support for obtaining the additional training. MVR covered the travel to the training and CTI provided an On-the-Job-Training, to enhance her skills.

She was now ready for employment, and obtained a position out of state. MVR assisted with transportation costs. CTI provided initial rent & daycare. She now makes over \$26 per hour. She has been promoted to running a mobile mammography unit performing scans on women not previously having access to them. She is successful!!



OLDER BLIND SERVICES SUCCESS STORY

This 79 year old woman with macular degeneration had been on the older blind caseload twice. She was provided with magnifiers, large print calendars, a check writing guide, a red & white support cane, bold lined paper, a large print calendar and other low vision aids. In addition, her washer, dryer, stove, dishwasher and microwave were marked with raised bump dots to assist her to safely operate her appliances. As a result, she manages her home in much the same manner as she has done her entire life, and she continues to cook and clean her home.

She and her husband continue to have well balanced, home cooked meals daily. She and the Blind and Low Vision Services (BLVS) staff worked on her computer skills and adjusted the settings on her computer so she could continue online banking, accessing email from her children and grandchildren, surf the web, and most importantly see photos of her grandchildren and great grandchildren living in other states and out of the country. She had both knees replaced while working with BLVS, and she continues to manage her mobility with the aid of her red and white support cane. BLVS provided assistance, but her desire to learn and utilize aids, was what really made her successful.



TRIBAL VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROJECT

Each year, this report highlights one of the six Native American Vocational Rehabilitation projects located in Montana. These projects are funded directly by the federal government to provide VR to American Indians residing on or near reservations. The following was submitted by the Assiniboine-Sioux Vocational Rehabilitation Program (ASVRP).



ASVRP has been in existence since 1992 serving tribal members with disabilities who are employable. Wilfred "Max" Bear was hired as the Project Director on October 1, 1998. Rain Escarcega-Turcotte and Paula Bighorn were hired as VR Counselors and Clarice Longtree is the Secretary. ASVRP provides VR services to an average of 100 consumers per year. Our projections for Status 26's for the past four years were: Year One - 13 successful closures but we had (26), Year Two - 14 closures but we had (27), Year Three - 16 closures but we had (26), and Year Four - 18 closures and finished with (23). Our fifth and final year of the grant projects 20 Status 26's.

ASVRP provides VR services to enrolled tribal members of any federally or state recognized tribe but mainly serves the Assiniboine and Sioux people on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation. ASVRP is located in Poplar, MT, which is the tribal headquarters for the Fort Peck Tribes. The nearest State VR office is in Havre, MT, which is 234 miles away and has two full-time VR Counselors that serve the Hi-Line. In the past, ASVRP and the State VR shared several case files of tribal members. According to federal guidelines, American Indians have the option of applying for State VR services or Tribal and can apply for services from both programs but cannot receive duplicate services.

ASVRP has been a successful program in spite of a high turnover rate among staff members and an unusually high unemployment rate (65%). The programmatic design of our Tribal VR program is the same as the State VR's but we have the option to offer Native American Healing Ceremonies as part of our consumer's Individualized Plans for Employment. Those services are valuable to our program because many of our tribal members still practice the traditional ways of the Assiniboine and Sioux people. The Assiniboine and Sioux healing ceremonies are not the same and even though both tribes have lived on the same Reservation for many years the cultural differences have not changed or blended and remain unique to each tribe.

ASVRP used to provide a traditional meal and held a small giveaway for the consumers that completed the program. We shared a meal and presented those that entered the community workforce with a small gift. Tatanka Oyate (Buffalo People), a drum group, lead by one of our Sundance Leaders sang honor and prayer songs for our consumers and for the success of the program for the years to come. Unfortunately, our Tribal VR Specialists in Washington, D.C. demanded that we cease the ceremonies! The Tribal VR Specialists do not understand the cultural relevance of the meal and small gift that the program provided to our consumers. The loss of those services further eliminates our Indianness and strips our consumers of meaningful ceremonies that were held to strengthen and honor them. Ceremonies like this are an important part of our culture but sadly enough bureaucrats in Washington, D.C. see them as a form of entertainment.

State Rehabilitation Council (Council) Recommendations:

- Complete analysis of potential groups of unserved/underserved populations and develop guidance for staff to address issues that are impacting unserved/underserved populations.
- Complete report on best practices related to collaboration between Vocational Rehabilitation and Blind Services (VRB) staff and Section 121 projects. Then, provide a report to the Section 121 projects and VRB offices that work with Section 121 projects. The report will also be provided to the Council.
- Strengthen networking between VRB and other agencies. The Council and the Director of Field Services will discuss potential agencies where networking needs strengthening and recommend three areas that should be focused on in the upcoming year.
- Ensure VRB staff receive adequate training and support related to major agency changes such as the new database system and entering order of selection.
- Continue to utilize one Council meeting a year as an opportunity to interact with unserved/underserved populations and exchange perspectives and ideas.
- Have the Disability Employment and Transitions Division Transportation Coordinator present to the Council on initiatives that will assist people with disabilities obtain employment and independence.
- Have each Region report on transition activities in their area through a web based presentation.
- Encourage VRB staff to make contacts with the local Chambers of Commerce.

State Rehabilitation Council (Council) Achievements:

- The Council provided input on VRB's changes to address the needs of youth with disabilities in transition between school and adulthood. This included the completion of the transition video and expansion of the "adopt-a-school" initiative.
- The Council reviewed initial reports on the review of disability types, minority groups, and urban/rural populations. The Council was satisfied with this data and hopes further analysis will result in specific initiatives to improve services to unserved/underserved populations.
- The Council provided guidance in making the annual report a primarily web based document. This reduces the agency's costs and makes the document more accessible. The council now wants to increase the public's awareness of the VRB webpage and the resources available at the site.
- The Council provided significant guidance in the development of the VRB 2014-17 strategic plan. The Council plans on assisting with the monitoring of the progress of the plan over the next three years.
- The Council continues to emphasize that VRB be a model of an accessible workplace for its employees. They recognize that the purchase a new case management system was a necessary step in achieving this goal. They are awaiting activation of the system to assist with assessment of the accessibility of the system.
- Council members participated in community events related to Montana Main Street and will continue to participate when the opportunity arises.
- A joint meeting was held with the Statewide Independent Living Council.

VRB STATS AT A GLANCE

Successful Closures	
Year	# of Closures
2010	716
2011	776
2012	830
2013	896

Average Wage of Closures	
Year	Hourly Wage
2010	\$11.09
2011	\$11.46
2012	\$11.90
2013	\$12.16

Disability Type Summary	
Type of Disability	Percentage of those served in 2012
Physical Disabilities	34%
Mental Disabilities	54%
Sensory Disabilities	12%