



## WSRC QUARTERLY MEETING MINUTES

*Thursday, November 2, 2023*

*9:00am to 2:05pm*

**Members Present:** Drew Cassidy, Workforce Training Representative, Olympia  
Laurae MacClain, Tribal VR Representative, Nespelam  
Peggy Frisk, Vice Chair, Community Rehabilitation Provider, Lake Stevens  
Cassi Villegas, DVR Interim Director, Ex-Officio, Lacey  
Jen Chong-Jewell, Parent Advocate, Everett  
Jennifer Bean, Council Chair, Client Assistance Program, Bellingham  
Matt Newton, Business Representative, Tacoma  
Alexandra Toney, OSPI Representative, Olympia  
Aimee Elber, Disability Advocacy Representative, Spokane

**Members Absent:** Lesa Dunphy, DVR Counselor Representative, Ex-Officio, Colville  
Michele Stelovich, Labor Representative, Everett  
Edward Nicholson, Business Representative, Vancouver

**Council Staff:** Shelby Satko, WSRC Executive Director, Lacey  
Jolie Ramsey, WSRC Executive Assistant, Lacey

**Visitors:** Allison Wright  
Jay Hopkins, DVR Supervisor  
Jo'el Roth, DVR ATAP  
Shawn Walsworth, DVR Region 3 Administrator  
Mandy Kipfer, DVR Deputy Region 3 Administrator  
Sonya Sanders, DVR Interim Deputy Director  
Regina Burke, DVR VRC  
Ronnie Oswald  
Pablo Villarreal, DVR Workforce and Youth Chief  
Rosanne Morales, DVR VRC  
Ann Martin, DVR Field Service Administrator  
Audrie M.  
Chad M.  
Brenda Kim  
Lan Totten, Program Director, Cascade Connections  
Doug Burkhalter, Client Assistance Program  
Lucinda Heidel, DVR Supervisor  
Isaac Folkerts  
Rena Van Meter

Lindsay Fisher  
Alexander Diseth, Regional Director, Community Employment Services  
Christelle Arnett, DVR Tribal Relations Administrator  
Nikki Wegner, Chinook Enterprises  
Jamie Rasmussen, DVR Planning and Evaluation Manager  
Jennifer Killian  
Abby Smith, DVR Pre-ETS Program Manager  
Jamie Grund, DVR Finance & Budget Manager  
Rosanne Morales, DVR VRC  
Haley Gross, DVR VRC  
Bryce Nickel  
Mercedes Bekke, DVR Regional Support Operations Manager  
Kathy Powers, Orion  
Lauren Peterson, DVR Management Analyst  
Steven Potter, DVR Communications Manager

**Call to Order—** Meeting called to order at 9:00am by Jen Bean, Council Chair

**Motion:** Approval of August 2023 quarterly meeting minutes

**First:** Aimee Elber                      **Second:** Laurae MacClain

No edits, no abstentions.              **APPROVED**

**DVR Interim Director Updates:** Cassi Villegas

- DVR Director Search
  - A nationwide candidate search will begin next week.
  - Stakeholders will be contacted for input and feedback regarding qualities and key personality traits and contributions.
  - Cassi will not be applying for the position.
  - New Director should have a deep knowledge of vocational rehabilitation.
- New DVR Vision Statement: “Students, youth, and adults with disabilities are empowered to dream big and achieve their employment goals.”
  - New statement aligns with goals and reflects all populations served by DVR and the expectations of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).
  - Shared at recent DVR all-staff in-service.
  - Making sure everything we’re doing aligns with new vision.
- DVR In-service
  - Held a week prior to the launching of the new case management system, Waves.
  - Multiple training workshops offered to attendees.
  - The in-service was a positive experience for networking and getting to know each other better.
- Waves Case Management system launched
  - Waves launched for all DVR staff on Oct. 31.
  - Field staff, Policy & Strategies team, IT, Executive Leadership Team, and the vendor are all on-site this week for support, troubleshooting, and training for field staff.
  - The vendor has commented that this has been a very positive, successful system launch thus far. DVR was well prepared.

- Business modernization
  - Developed and launched a modernized SharePoint site for staff.
  - Rolled out knowledge interpreter.
    - AI/Chat GPT was created for DVR for the customer services manual.
    - Waves FAQs will be added to it too.
    - Updated every 24 hrs.
- Improving Pre-ETS
  - Workforce and Youth Chief, Pablo Villarreal overseeing and leading efforts with program managers.
  - Goal is to have a new Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) contract before the next school year.
  - Transition Collaborative to get school to work in more school districts/counties.
- Staff retention is a key priority.
- Fundamentals Map in Results
  - Results is the enterprise performance management system.
  - Cassi demonstrated the Fundamentals Map feature in Results
    - Tool to visualize how each component of our collective contributions work together to reach our agency vision and goals.
      - Where do we spend the most efforts? What do these processes and focuses look like? What are the measures? Customer service outcomes? Outcome categories, performance improvement, data, determining eligibility, etc.
    - High level categories:
      - Foundations, Key Goals, Outcome Categories, Operating Processes, Supporting Processes

#### **Questions/Discussion:**

1. Staff Values awards
  - a. Value categories: transparency, integrity, empowerment, innovation, collaboration, EDAI.
  - b. How do you determine the topics/categories? How could DVR recognize staff who are more “behind the scenes”?
  - c. Cassi explained the process of nominating peers.
2. Accommodating staff with disabilities
  - a. Is there a focus in the Fundamentals Map that accounts for accessibility for staff, as well as stakeholders and customers?
  - b. Equity, Diversity, Access, and Inclusion will be interlaced and deeply imbedded in every category.
    - i. There is not one explicit area, but it is a priority of DVR Executive Leadership.
3. Getting Authorizations for Payments (AFP) from Waves
  - a. What is the progress at for CRPs? CRPs will get new AFPs. The timeline is based on individual’s caseload. DVR will be reissuing AFPs as soon as possible, within 1-2 weeks.

#### **DVR Budget Updates: Jamie Grund**

- Program Income
  - FFY 22: \$7,353,632

- FFY 23: \$7,999,850
- Relinquishment
  - \$15 million of Basic Support 2023 funds went back to RSA to be redistributed to other VR programs nationwide.
  - This reduced our Pre-ETS set aside from \$7.5 million to \$5.2 million.
  - Estimated 7.5% increase to the Basic Support 2024 Grant. We have not received the total amount yet.
- DVR met/overspent our Basic Support 2022 Pre-ETS set aside from Oct. 2022 to Sept. 2023 grant by \$153,000.
- Sources of Revenue
  - General Fund State SFY 2024 is \$25 million
  - Federal Basic Support 2023 carryover is \$21 million
  - Federal Basic Support 2024 is approximately \$55 million
  - Federal Supported Employment is approximately \$400,000
  - Federal Independent Living Grant is approximately \$430,000
  - Social Security Reimbursement is approximately \$7 million
- Unspent Pre-ETS funds for Basic Support 2023 is \$3,282,878

## Questions

1. Are there plans/strategies in place to spend the money?
  - a. Plan to spend more on customers. Customers are the number one priority.
  - b. DVR can relinquish funding or ask for additional funding. We will continue to monitor that.
2. What is DVR's perspective is on social security reimbursement? SRC Blind declined reimbursements to prioritize spending VR dollars.
  - a. Jamie said this is strategic and great, and a way DVR can spend those dollars too. DVR does not anticipate needing to relinquish any funding currently. The program income is still very valuable and will benefit our program.
  - b. Decline Reimbursement to prioritize spending VR dollars? Our spending has increased post-covid. We are spending more on customers. With an increase in spending, we anticipate spending that money so that the money will not be sent back to RSA.
3. Are we seeing differences in how DVR is spending money post-covid? Has that been evaluated?
  - a. Jamie answered, no, it was adjusted for inflation. Jamie said they don't necessarily look at that. Our fiscal dept. does not track these aspects. It would be interesting to see how our purchases for customers have changed. See if unspent funds could be reallocated to partners for WTB or OSPI programs.
4. What about spending more as adjusted for inflation?
  - a. Fiscal does not necessarily look at that factor. The increased funding could be due to inflation. Jamie will report back. **-ACTION**
  - b. Requested a report of the spending categories and spending over time. **-ACTION**

## CSPE Subcommittee: Jen Bean and Jolie Ramsey

- Overall customer satisfaction remains stagnant.
  - Overall satisfaction: 68%
  - DVR moves quickly enough for me: 57%
  - My counselor cares about my input: 76%
  - Region 3 respondents reported lowest scores overall.

- A group of DVR staff, Shelby, and Jen will move forward with a time-limited problem-solving group to focus on the timeliness of services.
  - Will meet at the end of Nov. and early Dec.
  - Goal is to identify one best practice or activity that could be implemented statewide for all staff to improve timeliness of services.
- Customer Listening Sessions held in October with Tacoma and Puyallup customers.
  - 3 men, 5 women; 5 Caucasian, 2 African American, 1 Native American
- General Themes
  - Communication: Overall, very positive feedback. One customer shared how his VRC was very unresponsive and took months to return his calls and emails.
  - Community Rehabilitation Providers: slow to respond, long wait lists.
- What DVR Has Done Well
  - Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors
    - 7 out of 8 customers reported their VRC is supportive, encouraging, knowledgeable.
  - Assistance to access to wraparound services (dental care, transportation, etc.)
- Suggestions for Improvement
  - Slow process
  - Consistency in communication
  - Customer goals
- Council's Analysis
  - When DVR staff respond to customers' inquiries and needs in a timely manner, it helps customers feel important, valued, and cared for. A few customers expressed that they do not have many reliable people in their lives who can help them, and when their VRC is responsive and dependable in their communication, it increases their sense of self-worth to know that someone cares about them. Good communication makes a big difference in customer satisfaction.
  - DVR staff meet with customers both in-person and online, depending on the customer's preference, which customers appreciate.
  - The wraparound services that DVR customers can access can be lifechanging. Some individuals otherwise would not have been able to get emergency dental work done, money for minor car repairs, get set up with transportation to/from work and medical appointments, receiving financial aid, or have access to basic assistive technology to complete job applications online or online college courses. Multiple customers expressed how DVR services improved their quality of life.

## Question

1. What efforts are made to explain to customers the VR process and why it takes time to see progress?
  - a. Understanding DVR services is an area of need. Region 3 leadership reported that staff is currently contacting customers every 30 days. Staff seek to help customers understand where they are in the VR process. It is helpful when they understand.

## Region 3 Leadership Updates: Shawn Walsworth and Mandy Kipfer

- Staffing/Vacancies
  - Seven vacancies in the region. Staff leaving the agency.
  - Two RTs, one Supervisor.
  - Allesandra Goard will start in Tacoma on Nov. 16.

- The VRC 1-3 training positions-seven positions in the region
  - Working to provide more administrative support to the VRCs. Leadership was able to get six Office Assistant supported employment positions for the region. There are many candidates, hope to onboard them within the month.
- Staff commuting into Pierce County due to cost of living. Staff turnover in part due to this in Tacoma/Puyallup.
- Float positions
  - Suzy in Vancouver and Elizabeth (housed in Puyallup office) help keeping cases moving forward.
- Customer contacts. Communication is a key component.
- Intensive Job Placement (formerly known as Job Management Plan)
  - Systematic rollout. County Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA), DDA Field Staff, DVR collaborating.
- DDA/DVR Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) release will be soon.
- Training video
  - Tentative release is mid-November on YouTube.
- Workforce Relationships
- Identified Workforce Development Council (WDC) liaison for every WDC.
- Met with Katie Condit, CEO Workforce Central, to strategize ways for training opportunities for customers. Striving to help customers feel comfortable at Workforce centers.
- Collaboration for a Cause
  - Part of a big Job Fair yesterday. 1,200 community members came to hear about job opportunities.
- Case Management and Assistive Technology
- Waves
  - Staff training impacts...how will it affect customers?
  - Onboarding delays for new staff
  - 8 “in training” positions
- Assistive Technology Assessment Practitioner (ATAP)
  - Monthly ATAP open office hours
  - Outreach
- Customer Satisfaction
- Rapid/Meaningful Engagement
  - Coffee and Conversation. Have interpreters. Open conversation to share and discuss. About 45 people attended the most recent one. A good way to bring the region together. They have held them for over a year now. Good for camaraderie.
  - Weekly Supervisor meetings
- Pierce County changes
  - Tacoma 1 and 2. Tacoma 2 supervises by Puyallup supervisor.
  - Tacoma 1 VRS resignation. Alessandra Goard to fill this position.
- Regional updates
  - Reviewing expectations for call backs
  - Touring the offices
- WSRC support
  - Staff want to know more details about customer satisfaction survey results. **-ACTION**
- Challenges
  - Higher than normal turnover rates. Staff leaving to work in other areas where cost of living is cheaper. Leaving DVR for higher paying jobs.

- Hiring qualified staff—8 VRCs have “in-training” plans.
- Region 3 has all supervisors except one are new. Some do not have a VR background. They do bring other attributes.
- Vacant Regional Counselor for the Deaf (RCD) position
- Successes
  - Enthusiastic staff
  - Decreased vacancies by 75%
  - Proactive about addressing challenges and staff are receptive.
  - Looking at new phone system for customer satisfaction consistency
  - WAC training for staff. Has been helpful to learn what DVR can do for customers.
  - Waves case management system went live.

### Questions/Comments

1. Are there opportunities for new hires to be paired with other staff to help with training?
  - a. Yes, supervisors are paired up with each other for support. They meet weekly.
2. Will recruit for Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf (RCD) soon. Regional leadership is utilizing programs like Western Oregon University and Gallaudet to better serve the Deaf and HOH community.
3. Gather, use the data collected from exit interviews to inform reasons for attrition.
4. School to Work.
  - a. Intensive job placement services. How is school to work going? When the DDA/DVR intensive placement rolled out, they would continue to stay on DVR caseload, and DDA paid for those services.
  - b. There are a few districts where school to work is working very well, and other areas where the districts do not currently see the value in school to work. Transition team working to help them see the value and assess risks.
5. A DVR/DDA memorandum of understanding draft was just completed. Meeting in January with DDA to review and finalize.

### Tacoma & Puyallup Unit Updates: Rosanne Morales and Mandy Kipfer

- Staffing
  - Tacoma 1: 6 VRCs and 2 RTs, 1 RT position in recruitment. The open supervisor position will be filled in two weeks.
  - Tacoma 2: 1 VRC, 1 RT, and 1 VRC in recruitment.
  - Puyallup: 3 VRCs, 2 RTs and 1 VRC in recruitment. Still unable to fill the Business Specialist Role due to low pay and high cost of living in Pierce County.
- Transition Services
- Connecting with Pierce County transition partners. Attend a monthly meeting that brings CRPs, teachers, DVR, DDA, school administrators. Talk and highlight different resources. Opportunity network.
- Dedicated transition VRC.
- Interagency transition network meeting
- Strong School to Work and Job Foundations partnership
  - Meeting with the county to iron out details. Taking on school to work students through referrals.
- Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)
  - Stacy Kidd, Regional Transition Consultant (RTC) is working to make connections to serve all schools in Pierce County.

- New Schools
- Work-based learning and work readiness for 40 students
- Need for Pre-ETS
- Two years ago, 70 students were served, then 300 students and Stacy is predicting 500 served in 2024.
- Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCD) position.
  - Posted three times.
  - Sent recruitment announcement to Gallaudet, WA School for the Deaf, etc.
- Shortage of ASL interpreters (in-person) for VR planning meetings and job starts.
- Connecting with internal RCD DVR staff for recommendations.
- Tribal VR Partnership
  - Increased proficiency in remote service delivery
  - Staff providing resources for customers.
  - Reduction in travel allows for more meetings online with businesses and schools.
- Challenges
  - Changes in supervisory leadership for offices
  - High staff turnover
  - Seeing customers in a timely manner due to increase in eligibility and Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).
- Successes
  - Strong, cohesive teams
  - High job placements
  - Connection with the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Biz Town
  - Relationship with WorkSource
  - New office at Southside Mall
  - Dedicated outreach providing transition services and participation in local job fairs.
- Performance metrics for Pierce County
  - Total customers: 892
  - New applications: 609
  - New Plan: 436
  - Rehabilitations: 180

**Executive Committee: Jen Bean**

- There are two candidates for the Current/Formal Recipient of Services Representative position. Interviews will be held soon.
- Great progress made on the 2023 annual report. It will be submitted to RSA in December.
- 2024 Meetings
  - May and August meetings will be in-person/hybrid. Locations TBD.
  - The February and November meetings will be held virtually only.
  - NCSRC/CSAVR Conferences will be held in October 2024 in Seattle. We may need to move our Q4 quarterly meeting.
- Shelby was appointed to the Board of National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils. Her 1<sup>st</sup> board meeting will be in Dec.

**Policy & Planning Subcommittee: Shelby Satko**



- Work on the DVR State Plan. Talent and Prosperity for All (TAP) plan. Shelby presented with the Policies and Strategies Team at the recent DVR in-service on the State Plan.
- In January there is a 30-day public comment period, and Jan. 17 from 10-11:30am will be a public forum. This will be an opportunity for feedback.
- The draft plan will be posted to DVR website in December.

#### **Partnership Subcommittee:** Alexandra Toney

- Forward planning
- Created a Microsoft Teams channel as a platform to update documents in real time and collaborate. The plan is to create a channel for each subcommittee. Shelby will work with our IT department to create them.

#### **Public Comment**

- No public comment

#### **Council Wrap-up**

- Laurae MacClain: Impressed with Region 3's enthusiasm and approach to training new staff. Looking forward to seeing what the Region will accomplish.
- Matt Newton: The Fundamentals Map is a great visual to guide our work. Very helpful. Everything can't be a priority all the time. The map provides a great structure. Finding ASL interpreters is a global problem. He struggles in the UK, France, Ireland, Canada. Find a contractor DVR can use for ASL. Via Purple or Sorenson, etc.?
- Jen Chong-Jewell: The Feb. meeting will focus on transition. Special Education Advisory Council could join this meeting. Maybe by next October, we have a shared statement about the Rehab Act, etc. that our councils jointly support. Addressed the term "[administrative burden](#)". How does DVR think about reducing administrative burden on customers? Could there be metrics to measure how administrative burden affects customers? Jen Bean shared the financial statement may be done away with, and the vocational impact form-a lengthy form-. DVR has considered specialized caseloads. Drew Cassidy added that they are shoring up partnerships to make better connections and standardize—system alignment. Streamline processes and referral processes. This is part of the WTB's current strategic plan.
- Drew Cassidy: Appreciated discussion on collaborating with WorkSource offices. Let's keep talking about this.
- Aimee Elber: We see the younger generation entering the workforce. Encourage DVR how we retain our staff, employee engagement, innovative thinking, and stepping outside comfort zones to modernize recruitment, expectations, job requirements.
- Christelle Arnett: Her role Tribal VR programs, Government to Government relations, and making sure Alaska Natives receive equitable services in WA State.

**Meeting adjourned at 2:05pm**